The Dissertation Committee for Michael Francis Scully Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

American Folk Music Revivalism,

1965-2005

Committee:

Jeffrey Meikle, Supervisor

Mark C. Smith

William M. Stott

Richard R. Flores

Douglas E. Foley

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by

Michael Francis Scully, B.A.; J.D.

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Dedication

For Doreen, Colin and Kara, with love

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offered unfettered access to certain company records, were quick to provide introductions to others when I requested and reviewed portions of the manuscript in draft to help me correct factual errors. I suspect that I have made statements in the dissertation with which they disagree, perhaps vehemently. Nonetheless, they approached this project in a spirit of intellectual honesty and an understanding that the telling of history inevitably involves subjective interpretation. They never asked for textual control and they did not review the final text before I submitted it. Any errors that remain are mine. There are many "histories" that can be written about Rounder Records and I hope that others will endeavor to write further about this valuable and fascinating company.

Phyllis Barney, the Folk Alliance executive director and "Goddess," gave generously of her time and provided me with access to Alliance archival material. Margo Blevin read chapter 8 in draft and offered insight that helped me gain a fuller understanding of the Alliance. Jennifer Cutting provided crucial reference help at the Archive of Folk Culture at the U.S. Library of Congress. Jeffrey Meikle, my supervisor, offered encouragement, wisdom and textual advice. Professors Mark Smith, Bill Stott, Richard Flores and Douglas Foley all helped shape my thinking and the project is better for their involvement. My children, Colin and Kara, provided me with untold joy and a sense of purpose through the years of research and writing.

American Folk Music Revivalism, 1965-2005

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Michael Francis Scully, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Jeffrey Meikle

This dissertation analyzes the present-day meaning of the construct of "folk music," as vernacular music adherents attempt to thrive within an increasingly profit-driven entertainment industry. It begins by examining the late nineteenth century efforts of the American Folklore Society, whose members urged the preservation of traditionally based customs and expressions that they feared were vanishing in a changing America. With an initial emphasis on the lore of Native Americans and former slaves, the society helped define the "folk" as the dispossessed and the powerless, contrasting them with the more powerful would-be saviors of their legacy. In the mid twentieth century intellectual battles raged over the commingling of lore and commercial entertainment. The commercialization of lore, and associated controversies, reached a peak during the

"folksong revival" of the 1960s, when the music industry invested heavily in ersatz folk music as a profitable commodity.

The dissertation closely examines Rounder Records, the largest American record company devoted predominantly to vernacular styles, and the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance, a trade organization for self-styled folk musicians and supporting entrepreneurs. Rounder, by defining "traditional" and "vernacular" broadly, has helped re-define the concept of folk music while successfully marketing an eclectic musical catalog within a restrictive commercial environment. The Folk Alliance struggles to advance commercial opportunities for vernacular musicians while honoring folk music's historical connection to community traditions. The dissertation pays particular attention to the contemporary performance of old-time country music and the Cajun music and zydeco indigenous to Louisiana, analyzing how musicians strive to remain artistically vital and commercially viable within genres defined by perceived cultural essentials.

Blending folklore scholarship, biography, contemporary cultural analysis and an examination of the present-day music industry, the dissertation analyzes the ongoing tension between the marketplace and the construct of "the folk." Notwithstanding such tension, Americans' continued interest in folk music reveals their never-ending fascination with the past, their on-going desire for a sense of community and their fierce—if sometimes hidden—resistance to cultural standardization.

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE FOLKIES GONE?
An Introduction

In the last week of February 2004, the Town and Country Resort in San Diego, California, is doing what it does throughout much of the year—hosting a large business conference with participants from across the United States and overseas. The talk inside the on-site convention center is the stuff of many such conferences, revolving mostly around manufacturing, marketing, sales, budgets and continuing professional education. This week, however, conference participants also speak of such intangibles as the role of tradition in American life, the importance of racial and ethnic heritage and the meaning of community. They discuss concerns about the mixture of art and commerce and, sometimes with an ironic nod to the sterile nature of their locale, the danger posed by the increasing standardization of American life. Paradoxically, these varied subjects are commingled as conference participants school themselves in more efficient methods of packaging and selling the tradition, heritage and sense of community that most of them claim to value. A cynic could have a field day here, mocking the perceived hypocrisy of one more group of hucksters, drinking in a hotel bar while figuring out how to commodify and profit from that which they claim is sacred. A closer look, however, might give this cynic pause.

The first hint that something more than mere profiteering might be afoot is the music. It is everywhere. For four days, the entire conference takes place amidst a backdrop of music—music in the lobbies, the hallways and meeting rooms and, throughout the night, in guestrooms that are open to anyone who wanders by. This is not

the usual piped-in Muzak so prevalent in commercial buildings. Nor is it the music of mainstream radio, whether "Top-40," "Classic Rock," "Golden Oldies," or any other standard format driven by consultants who analyze demographics and target markets. This music is live and of a type virtually never heard on radio today. Musical instruments abound. There is an abundance of guitars, but also banjos, fiddles and dulcimers. There are harmonicas, accordions and bagpipes. There is bluegrass and old-time Appalachian fiddling, acoustic blues and gospel, a cappella mountain ballads and polka. There are songs that recount historic events, and a plethora of deeply personal, confessional tunes of the type made famous by Joni Mitchell and James Taylor, circa the early 1970s. There is not a trace of the popular music that garnered the bulk of radio play and consumer dollars through the second half of the twentieth century. There is neither rock nor disco. There is no punk, no new wave, no grunge, no hip-hop and no teen-pop. Conference attendees, many of whom do not perform for a living, play most of this music, and the sheer magnitude and strangeness of it forces one to dig beneath the surface to determine just what this gathering is about.

From February 26 through February 29, 2004, the Town and Country Resort hosted the Sixteenth-Annual International Conference of the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance, referred to popularly as the Folk Alliance. Founded in 1989, the Alliance exists "to foster and promote traditional, contemporary and multicultural folk music and dance, and related performing arts in North America."[1] Once a year the Alliance holds the international conference that constitutes its primary activity. The gathering brings together record label executives, booking agents, concert promoters, instrument makers, recording engineers and musicians. They come together to discuss

folk music, defined here loosely—and just for the moment—as music that is rooted in the long-held traditions of disparate vernacular groups, whether those groups are characterized by race, ethnicity, geography, occupation or some other unifying trait. Viewed narrowly, it is the goal of Folk Alliance members to take this music, which many consider the non-commercial expression of core community identity, and sell it, while respecting the uniqueness and value of both the art and the groups from which it flows. It is a seemingly contradictory exercise, fraught with the possibility of over-simplification, misrepresentation and exploitation. Most Alliance members are aware of these perils, which have accompanied the promotion of folk culture in America for over one hundred years. How folk music aficionados confront these difficulties at the dawn of the twenty-first century is the subject of this dissertation.

I discovered the Folk Alliance in early 1993 through a Sing Out! magazine notice promoting its upcoming conference, scheduled for February of that year in Tucson, Arizona.[2] At the time I was a commercial litigator in San Francisco, growing increasingly bored with the practice of law. I was also a baby boomer and consummate music fan who, like many of my contemporaries, had lost touch with the popular music of the day. It is not that I disliked REM or Pearl Jam or other then contemporary bands that I might have worshipped 15 years earlier but that I was unfamiliar with them. Preoccupied with burgeoning family and professional responsibilities, I had stopped listening. Hoping to stem my boredom, I embarked on a conscious effort to enjoy music once more and I began by turning to the familiar. In my case, that was not the so-called classic rock that blossomed between 1967 and 1975, with which I was fairly well versed, but the popular "folk music" that flourished commercially in the late fifties and early sixties.

During those years the American entertainment industry invested heavily in folk music, or something called folk music, as a popular, profitable commercial commodity. So-called folksingers sold millions of records and concert tickets. New folk music stars, such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, launched lucrative and long-running music industry careers. Book and magazine publishers, instrument makers and manufacturers of such products as liquor and cigarettes all sought to capitalize commercially on the folk music craze.[3] Strictly speaking, a "commercial folksong" is an oxymoron. As traditionally understood, a folksong is an ancient artifact of unknown origin; one that has survived, despite change, through oral transmission within and among relatively insular vernacular communities. The term does not refer to music presented in ready-made form, for profit, to a mass audience. Thus, the sixties folksong movement rested on a contradiction. Participants valorized the naturally occurring, non-commercial music that they believed was a part of everyday life—music performed at weddings and funerals, in the workplace, and amidst children at play. They then took that music and, motivated by respect, nostalgia, or the possibility of profit, sought to present it to a mass audience, altering radically the context of original creation and function that captivated them in the first place.

Many participants in the sixties folk music movement, though aware of the problem posed by decontextualization, cared deeply about the preservation and presentation of genuine, non-commercial, vernacular expression. Working through a well-defined circuit of music festivals, small clubs and independent record labels, these activists sought, studied and promoted songs, musical styles and performers from non-mainstream American subcultures, with a particular emphasis on the music of the early

American south. Still, the vast majority who experienced folk music in the 1960s through the products of the major entertainment media, did not hear genuinely traditional folk expression. Instead, they enjoyed commercial arrangements of a repertoire derived from folk sources, and newly composed songs characterized, often for economic reasons, as folksongs. Millions loved "Tom Dooley," the Kingston Trio hit that ushered in the commercial folk craze. Recorded in a highly polished style and performed by clean-cut professional entertainers with a well honed, easy-on-the-ears stage act, it was a perfect expression of the commodification of folk culture that proved so popular at that time. Those troubled by its success believed that, as presented, it communicated nothing about the history, present-day conditions and musical style of its Appalachian source, subjects of tremendous importance to the romantic adventurers who roamed America's remote corners in search of truly local cultural expression.

Whether manifested through a polished concert performance, an old hillbilly record, or a staged recreation of freedom marchers raising their voices in song, the collective activity surrounding folk music's presence in mass culture during the early-sixties came to be known as the "folksong revival." The phrase is a contested one. Folklorist Neil Rosenberg, conscious of the extent to which folk music became a popular phenomenon, refers to the period more colloquially as the "great boom."[4] The late Ralph Rinzler, who, from the 1950s to the 1990s, promoted vernacular culture as a musician, commercial entrepreneur and government programmer, took issue with the term. He characterized the movement as one marked not by revival, but by the "arrival" of a folk music awareness among an educated, urban, consumer society.[5] Rinzler's astute wordplay recognizes at least two truisms. First, in an unbroken line, up to and through the

1960s, Americans produced and transmitted non-commercial, community-based music as an unself-conscious part of their daily lives. Second, the conscious promotion of folk culture by those outside the culture in question—those promoting their own commercial, social or political agenda—pre-dated the sixties by many decades.[6] The discovery and commodification of folk music forms by broad segments of 1960s society did not "revive" that which had never died.

Within their stated frameworks, Rosenberg and Rinzler are each correct. However, in certain instances, the term "revival" is also literally precise. For example, during the sixties, outside activists, including Rinzler, helped re-invigorate traditional Cajun music within its Louisiana home. Folklorist Archie Green acknowledges that true "revival" was part of the sixties phenomenon but adds that the movement also encompassed the "survival" of vernacular forms within enclaved communities and the "arrival" of such forms as they traveled "from special group to large society." Recognizing that language must strike a balance between communicative convenience and literal precision, Green concludes that "revival" was the best word to describe the "cultural explosion, sales boom, and expansion in consciousness about expressive matters" that characterized the early sixties.[7]

Born in 1954, I was too young to have experienced the revival as it occurred. I came to it in early 1968, in a moment that I recall with great clarity. Walking into the living room of my family's home in Queens, New York City, I saw a guitarist on television singing an explicit anti-war song, a type of song that I had never before heard. "Phil Ochs," said my older sister. At the time, I was a precocious 13-year-old with an incipient political consciousness and a developing fascination with the growing anti-

Vietnam war movement. I fancied myself a fan of Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul and Mary, though I knew nothing of the milieu that nurtured those artists or the context in which their careers developed and I did not truly understand Dylan. I had never heard of Ochs but was immediately in awe of him. I quickly purchased his three albums on Elektra Records, which consisted almost entirely of topical songs drawn, as Ochs acknowledged proudly, from the day's headlines.[8]

The song I had heard on television was "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore," from the 1965 album of the same name. By the time I discovered it, the tune had become an anti-war anthem, though neither it nor Ochs had enjoyed anything approaching mainstream success. Like almost every song on those three records, its lyric was a straightforward expression of Ochs' leftist socio-political beliefs. As other albums revealed, Ochs' art was already moving beyond overt political commentary but the topical explicitness of his earliest work was perfect, in my case, for educating a teenager ready to embrace the language of leftist "movement culture." I listened to those records virtually non-stop in that tumultuous year, 1968, leading my sister to joke that our neighbors, hearing the subversive sounds emanating from my bedroom window, would surely be calling the FBI. Now, whenever I hear someone pose the insoluble question of whether art can truly mold beliefs, I remember that Ochs' lyrical commitment to humanism, pluralism and genuine democracy, shapes my political value system to this day.

I read everything I could find about Phil Ochs and quickly discovered the links between him and Bob Dylan and the coterie of New York performers who had been part of the folksong movement. I explored Dylan's early protest albums more thoroughly than I already had and purchased records—some recorded years earlier—by other Ochs

contemporaries, such as Tom Paxton, Eric Andersen, Joan Baez and Dave Van Ronk. While I discovered North Carolina's Doc Watson during this period, I did not develop any broader interest in the older, rural "source singers" whom, I learned later, many considered the more authentic folk performers. Nor, beyond Peter, Paul and Mary, was I interested in the numerous folk vocal groups that flourished in the wake of The Kingston Trio, such as The Journeymen or The Limeliters. I considered such groups too smooth and corny for consideration. Cultivating my own absurdly romantic self-image—I was then an eighth-grader at Sacred Heart Catholic Elementary School—I favored bohemians who, like Ochs, sang political songs or, like Baez, presented her ballads free of stereotypical show business adornment or, like Van Ronk, sang with some non-commercial grit in his voice. They were more accessible than someone like Clarence Ashley, the rediscovered Appalachian balladeer who first recorded in the 1920s, and, I knew intuitively, far cooler than those blatant show business stylists, The New Christy Minstrels and their vapid ilk.[9]

As I pursued this musical journey in the late 1960s, I was completely ignorant of the academic construct of the "folk" and I had no idea what it meant to be a folksinger or sing a folksong. I adopted an ad hoc definition that I shared with many, one that still thrives and continues to bedevil those who recognize "folk" as a term of art with a complex lineage. To me, a folksinger was someone who sang to the accompaniment of his or her own acoustic guitar. There might be other instruments in the mix but they appeared sparingly and never interfered with the lyric, which was often political or historical and always demanded careful listening. For the most part, folksingers came from New York's Greenwich Village or moved there as soon as they could or, at the very

least, hung out there a lot, with other folksingers. I had never heard of the folksong revival. Nor did I know that this revival was purportedly over—extinguished, some claimed, a few years earlier at the Newport Folk Festival by Bob Dylan's electrified rock, in a treasonous yet overpowering rebuke to the acoustic protest movement that had brought him fame. I had never heard of the Newport Folk Festival.

Time passed, and during the 1970s I learned that these early musical heroes had played a major role in a cultural phenomenon that sought—imperfectly and only in part—to present and interpret disparate American cultures to a mass audience, an audience far removed in time and space from the varied cultures presented. Eventually, I did listen to Clarence Ashley and other "hillbilly" and "country blues" performers who had been so important to some revival activists. I dipped my toes into bluegrass and developed a strong appreciation for electric blues, which I understood, dimly, grew from African-American vernacular expression. I enjoyed performers such as John Prine and Steve Forbert, two of the many singer-songwriters that the media trumpeted as "New Dylans." But I never pulled these varied strands together until the early 1990s. Clarence Ashley notwithstanding, I never analyzed my working definition of a folksinger as a Greenwich Village-habitué with a guitar. I certainly never thought about what it meant to refer to something—such as a music, or a people—as "folk." To me, folk was an interesting, slightly subversive musical genre—a record store label that guided my consumer selections. There was classical music, jazz, rock and folk.

All this changed as I listened again to my old records. With the enthusiasm of any newly committed hobbyist, I began a thorough exploration of precisely who these diverse folk artists were and why, during the sixties, they shared space on festival stages and

recorded anthologies. I spent my free time at the local library, poring through old newspapers and magazines in search of artist profiles or concert and record reviews, all circa 1960. I learned about John and Alan Lomax, the largely self-taught folklorists who, in the first half of the twentieth century, traveled the country recording artists and songs, providing much raw material for the sixties folk boom. Fancying myself something of a latter-day Lomax, I hoped to reconstruct artistic life in the Greenwich Village clubs and bars that possessed those fascinating names like the Gaslight, the Kettle of Fish and Gerdes Folk City. Along with my wife, a filmmaker and then the owner of a small commercial production company, I set out to interview revival stalwarts such as Tom Paxton, Dave Van Ronk and even the legendary Pete Seeger. To our astonishment, everyone whom we approached agreed and—until faltering finances intervened—we built a small library of audiotaped or filmed interviews.

Very rapidly, I learned that the Village constituted only one of several cohesive geographic scenes and that similar "folk enclaves" had existed in Boston and Cambridge, in the San Francisco Bay Area, in Chicago, in Ann Arbor and elsewhere. As I examined newspaper accounts of activity in those cities, I noted for the first time the breadth of performance styles that fell within the revival penumbra. Ochs, Baez and Van Ronk were there, to be sure, as were the Appalachian and acoustic blues performers whom I had first heard as a teenager. But there was also Cajun music and Yiddish music and Calypso and sometimes a smattering of miscellaneous European song that I could only characterize as "International." My confusion grew as I realized that I did not truly understand the forces that linked these disparate genres.

My ad-hoc education also alerted me to the debate that raged in the sixties about whether specific performers and performances served as sufficiently authentic representatives of particular musical genres and the cultures from which they grew. Could Dave Van Ronk, a white man born in Brooklyn, New York, sing the blues? Did he exemplify an African-American idiom, or a white man's honorable interpretation of that idiom, or was he a twentieth century minstrel—a bad joke that undermined the civil rights revolution flowering around him? Did a 20-minute presentation of Cajun music, transplanted from its community moorings to a northern festival stage, provide an elevating glimpse of Louisiana culture? Was it, instead, a freakish, commodified distortion that somehow trivialized Cajun life? Did the answer change if the music was or was not performed by native Cajuns? Did these issues need to be raised at all? Wasn't this simply entertainment? My effort to understand the importance of these questions—let alone answer them—forced me to formulate and confront those more basic questions that, I know now, are the subject of more than a century of scholarship: who are the folk, what is folk music, why do we study it and what is the impact of such study?

These questions give rise to an important distinction, one that is central to my subject. Applying ancient—and admittedly changing—definitions, I am not writing about traditional folksingers, per se, but about folk revivalists. If the concept of an enclaved folk has meaning, then traditional performers are members of that folk and their singing is neither a commercial enterprise nor the dedicated pursuit of a hobby revolving around organizations, scheduled events and formal performance. It is, instead, a more or less unselfconscious part of daily life. Folksinging, as I suggested at the outset, accompanies ordinary activity, whether that be work, worship, mourning or non-professional,

community entertainment. Since people do not use academic terminology to label their own lives, many whom revivalists valorize as "true" folksingers do not consider themselves members of the folk—whatever that may be—and they do not think of their songs as folksongs.

Revivalists, by contrast, tend to be self-conscious folksong interpreters, not genuine, tradition-based folksingers. Finding personal meaning in some often highly idiosyncratic idea of the folk, they seek out songs or styles defined as folk and derive emotional satisfaction from the fact of that definition, apart from whatever satisfaction stems from the music itself. The best expression of this distinction known to me is that of I. Sheldon Posen, who is both an academic folklorist and a singer of songs. Posen, who grew up in Toronto as a member of the urban middle class, threw himself into the folk revival in the 1960s. A true devotee, he performed only material he could define as traditional—whether or not it had anything to do with any of his personal traditions. In 1970, seeking to further his devotion, he enrolled in a graduate program in folklore, an act that shattered the constructs that previously guided his performing career.[10]

Academic fieldwork led Posen to the home of a Newfoundland fisherman, where he discovered an entire community that reveled in informal singing and knew many old, indigenous regional songs. Watching these neighbors sitting together in a kitchen, grasping hands as they sang, for their own enjoyment, songs they learned from one another, sent Posen into an existential tailspin. "This," he decided, was "the real thing; this is how it should be done." The corollary to this striking discovery was that Posen's own activities as a so-called folksinger were entirely artificial or, to use the folklorist's vernacular, inauthentic. He was prone to getting on stage in front of a sea of distant

strangers, where he engaged in what suddenly seemed a ghastly charade, singing a diverse grab-bag of songs to which neither he, nor most of his audience, had any family, community or occupational connection. The realization was so disorienting that, for a time, he stopped singing in public. He had, he observes wryly, "authenticized myself out of the folksong business."[11]

It took Posen several years of study and reflection before he could reconcile his own singing with his new understanding of non-commercial community culture. Ultimately he concluded that authenticity was relative and dependant wholly upon context. No matter what songs he sang, no matter how well he mastered the appropriate musical idiom, he accepted that he could never be an "authentic" Newfoundland "kitchen singer." Moreover, he realized that if he brought those "kitchen singers" to a revival stage, the resulting performance could never be a genuine representation of informal community expression. In each case, however, the performance might be artful, enjoyable, and educational, in addition to being an authentic reflection of the processes and values of one particular "folk group," that of the folk music revivalist. Able to perform publicly once more, Posen realized that he could sing whatever he pleased, in whatever style he pleased, without agonizing about the fact that he was neither a Newfoundlander nor a fisherman nor, for that matter, a Mississippi sharecropper. He was, he realized, an authentic revivalist and, in singing songs from traditions not his own, he "was doing what an urban folkie was supposed to be doing as a properly functioning member of the folksong revival."[12]

While Posen came to personal terms with the theoretical vagaries of revivalism, people still wrestle with the issues that troubled him. Through posing these seemingly

eternal questions, scholars and music fans alike struggle to shape their own attitudes regarding the commodification of culture, the meaning and value of tradition and the importance of heritage and community. With my own views still largely unformed, I attended the 1993 Folk Alliance conference in Tucson as little more than a curious, self-educated folk-revival "scholar" in progress. I paid scant attention to the precise nature of the organization and gave no sustained thought to my own role. Without a professional agenda, it was sufficient for me that the conference was interesting and fun, and going seemed consistent with my informal exploration of "all things folk music." I attended varied panel discussions encompassing the quasi-scholarly, such as "Beyond Copyright: Who Owns Traditional Music," and the purely practical, such as "Newsletter Production for Folk Organizations." I enjoyed the formal evening "showcases" at which I heard a great deal of excellent music, ranging from Mike Seeger's interpretation of U.S. Southern mountain tunes to the "rural and urban folk songs" of Greece presented by Sophia Bilides to the contemporary Texas/Mexican-influenced sounds of Tish Hinojosa to the Japanese Taiko drumming of the all-percussion ensemble Uzume Taiko. By now, I was educated sufficiently that the latter's musical distance from Phil Ochs was no longer surprising.

I was, however, oblivious to the fact that I was attending a commercial trade show sponsored by a self-styled business organization. Having never attended a trade show of any kind, I had no understanding of its purpose. I did not know that showcasing artists were unpaid but, had I thought about it, non-payment would have seemed perfectly natural, since I assumed that we were all there to revel in four days of "folk fellowship." The conference program, had I read it carefully, would have brought me back to earth, by informing me that these artists had traveled and performed at their own considerable

expense because they recognized that their 15 minutes on stage could be "critical to their future."[13] They were there, after all, to display their talent to concert presenters, record labels, and booking agents, in the hopes of developing careers as professional entertainers. These audience members were, in turn, looking to buy, provided the act was right for their venue, label or agency. To a degree far greater than usual, these performances were all about business. I was similarly blasé about the two exhibit areas in which roughly 100 businesses had paid for tables or booths to display services and products. This was an eclectic group ranging from management firms to instrument sellers to artists, who had all purchased permanent conference locations so interested buyers could find them. Dazzled by the posters, guitars and the large number of complimentary CDs, I wandered through as if I were attending a somewhat unusual craft fair.

It was in Tucson that I met Ken Irwin, one of the founding owners of Rounder Records, a label that has greatly influenced my thinking about the nature of the folk revival in the post-boom, late-twentieth century years. Though this "meeting" was nothing more than a quick introduction, I remember it because it accompanied one of the most spontaneous and magical nights of music I have ever experienced—an informal duet performance by Kate Brislin and Katy Moffatt, two singer-guitarists who recorded, separately, for Rounder. Beyond the memory of the music, the evening's significance lay in the unexpected opportunity to see Irwin at "work"—to watch him lose himself in a pure musical experience that served coincidentally as an informal audition for a professional combination still unexplored. The women knew of one another but had never met. While Irwin has a label owner's interest in hearing new sounds, he is also a

genuine and unabashed music addict, whose life in the record industry grew from his love of a broad range of vernacular American song. In Tucson, he grasped the opportunity to bring together two gorgeous voices, insisting that he was more interested in music than in potential commercial opportunity. He informed Randy Pitts, a mutual friend and then a California-based concert presenter, that Brislin and Moffatt intended to do some informal duet singing. Forewarned, Pitts and I kept Irwin in our sights throughout the evening until, around 11 PM, the women settled, with no public announcement, into an empty meeting room.

To that point, Moffatt had tended to record her own country-inflected compositions, while Brislin focused on cover versions of songs from country music's earliest days. Each woman favored a direct, under-produced sound far removed from modern Nashville product. For this evening's exploration of harmony singing, they leaned heavily on the repertoire of the "brother duets," which flourished in commercial country music from the 1930s through the 1950s. Identified with the Delmore Brothers, the Monroe Brothers and the Louvin Brothers, this duet sound is marked by voices matched with a perfection that seems possible only through years of sibling closeness. Putting aside its sheer musical beauty, the repertoire's lyrics evoke in the modern romantic an earlier time and a "purer" music focused not on commerce but on family, community and faith.[14]

To an astonishing degree, Brislin and Moffatt, though strangers, managed to recreate that sense of romance. Part of that stemmed from sheer technical skill—these women are simply great singers. Part stemmed from the excitement of the conference and part from the moment's seeming exclusivity. Though anyone could drop by, there were

many other things going on and relatively few wandered into this particular room. While attendance shifted a bit through the evening, it never numbered more than 10 at any given time. Moreover, the informal, organic exchange between the singers rewarded those who stayed. Those merely passing through might witness a false start, or observe one of the women teaching a lyric to the other, or hear them fumble with forgotten chords. Only over time did the beauty emerge fully. Sitting inches apart, Brislin and Moffatt sang for hours, becoming more comfortable with one another as it grew later. I stayed until about 3 AM, when fatigue overcame me. Pitts lasted until four, departing as the women still sang. Irwin remained. In an environment where some label executives might try to hear as much as possible—and there were many clamoring to be heard—he spent the entire night discerning the possibilities inherent in this particular collaboration. He stayed for love of the music and love of the romance, two impulses that helped shape the extensive Rounder catalog, which, in turn, helped shape the changing definition of folk music. Three years later Rounder released Sleepless Nights, a collection of duets by Brislin and Moffatt that captured the magic of their collaboration.[15]

I enjoyed my time in Tucson so much that I attended the Alliance conference the following year, this time in Boston. The 1994 conference was different in feel from the preceding year's event. Roughly 600 registrants had journeyed to Tucson. The Ramada Inn Downtown, where all activities took place, had a warm and casual air, facilitated by a roomy courtyard and an outdoor swimming pool that guests managed to enjoy despite frequent torrential rains. In contrast, over 1200 attended the Boston event, held at The 57 Park Plaza Hotel, an urban behemoth located just a few blocks from the city's crime-ridden, pornography-strewn "Combat Zone."[16] Early on, word got around that thieves

had broken into a car belonging to Bob Franke, a popular Boston-based performer, and stolen his guitar. This came as no surprise to those of us who spotted the somewhat frightening-looking prostitutes strolling the hotel corridors. The elevators were vastly inadequate to the task of shuttling attendees to the many conference events and large, sometimes irritable crowds waited for conveyances that seldom arrived. This forced us into the stairwells, where a perverse sense of community coalesced around juvenile acts of civil disobedience, ranging from smoking in forbidden zones to propping open the fire doors.

Adding to the hectic, sometimes tense air of the Boston conference was a vastly increased sense of professional competition, apparent even to me despite my still limited awareness that I was attending a business event. The juried showcases I had enjoyed in Tucson were present, but this year unofficial and informal "guerilla" showcases, staged all over the hotel, accompanied them. In countless guestrooms, artists or their representatives turned beds on end, clearing floor space for audiences. Using flyers taped over virtually every available square inch of hotel wallspace, they invited people to come, to listen and to employ the many featured entertainers. The literally hundreds of unofficial performances—unannounced until the conference began—threatened to overwhelm the formal program. Many attendees loved the resulting anarchic, carnivalesque atmosphere with its opportunity to see far more musical attractions than anticipated. Others saw a darker side.

In both Tucson and Boston the official showcases presented a reasonably balanced mix of styles, similar to one another only in their departure from the commercial mainstream. To the contrary, the guerilla showcases in Boston tended to

feature acoustic guitar players singing their original compositions, with subject matter that often leaned toward the purely personal. To those who loved folk music because of its connection to vernacular tradition, these were nothing but "Joni Mitchell-wannabees" dreaming of pop-crossover success and thus warranting nothing but contempt. What made matters worse was that some of these entertainers appeared to be manipulating the conference. Alliance management could control entry into the panel discussions, formal showcases and exhibit hall, making certain that attendees were paid conference registrants. Anyone, however, could enter a hotel room if they had rented the room or received an invitation from the tenant. Some of those performing unofficially had not bothered to register but, in a naked, unseemly display of ambition, had merely shown up to take advantage of the conference. Many participants resented this as a breach of some unspoken community ethos.

Still, the business of the Folk Alliance went on, and it was during the Boston conference that I had an experience that altered forever my perspective on the contemporary folk scene. It grew out of a chance encounter in the exhibit hall, where I found myself in conversation with a young singer and songwriter whom I did not know. In a discussion that lasted perhaps three minutes, I explained my interest in the great folk boom and talked excitedly of the many interviews I had conducted. His expression suggested that he found my fascination with the sixties about as exciting as a discourse on nineteenth-century monetary policy. In a voice that seemed to dismiss my interests out-of-hand, he said simply, "You should make a film about what's going on now." Parting, I concluded that he was a pleasant, ambitious young man with an inadequate sense of his own history. The thought that "what's going on now" could rival in

importance folk music's tremendous impact of 35 years earlier seemed ludicrous. Yet I never forgot his remark and its wisdom grew inescapable over time.

In the early 1990s, little scholarship existed analyzing the nature and impact of the sixties folk music revival. One exception was a 1985 article by folklorist Bruce Jackson that helped greatly in broadening my perspective. Jackson drew direct links between the folk boom and later government recognition of folk expression—as manifested in the annual Festival of American Folklife sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, and the American Folklife Center, a division of the Library of Congress. In the realm of popular culture, he also linked the revival directly to later folk music activism, concluding that the earlier phenomenon did not die, "so much as it became ordinary:"

> The nice thing about the folksong revival is how much of it survived and became part of the general culture, how much of it is still accessible. I doubt that rock music would have developed the way it had were it not for the folksong revival. More folk festivals go on now than ever went on during the 1950s and 1960s, and many of them reflect real sensitivity and sophistication in programming. Many are directed by graduates of folklore Ph.D. programs—men and women who themselves had often been in the audiences of the folk festivals of the 1960s. [17]

Beginning in the mid-1990s, roughly 10 years after Jackson wrote and several years after I began my own exploration, a spate of scholarly works analyzed the revival's impact on American culture.[18] I read this material with excitement, pleased that scholars were finally exploring the movement's role in illustrating the American character. I also read it at a time when I was engaged in a great deal of reflection about the work of the Folk Alliance and the impact of those who attended its conferences, who represented a

broad constituency of absent artists and fans. Ultimately, I grew to appreciate the extent to which the folk music activists who formed the Alliance in 1989, though acting more than a generation after the commercial folk boom had supposedly crumbled, were part of an enormous network of people searching for new ways to promote folk music as an aspect of popular culture. Though linked collectively to a specific past, these "folk entrepreneurs"—people such as record executive Irwin and concert promoter Pitts—were focused on the present and the future. In joining the Folk Alliance, they embraced an overarching infrastructure through which they could communicate, conduct business and educate themselves. Once I realized this, I understood that there is still a broad-based commercial folk music movement afoot, albeit one that enjoys less public visibility than in the sixties.[19]

As during the boom, the present-day fascination with folk music owes much to a yearning for community and a desire to appreciate heritage. Some people, repelled by the coarser aspects of our fast-paced, mobile and competitive society, use folk revivalism to connect themselves emotionally to idealized cultures that are removed from their own lives by time or physical distance. Dirk Powell, a Rounder recording artist who performs the southern mountain music of the early twentieth century, which he heard from his Kentucky grandfather, as well as the music of Cajun Louisiana, the heritage of his wife, expresses this well. "With computers," he says, "you can find somebody around the world who thinks just like you do. In a way, this makes the world smaller, but it can also mean you can sit in your house and not know your own neighbor." His wife and fellow recording artist, Christine Balfa, a member of a well-known family of Cajun musicians, maintains that some people address their sense of alienation by embracing, however

vicariously and momentarily, cultures that they perceive as more vibrant and close knit than their own. "People hear about Cajun people and they hear our music, and there is dancing, and there is food and there is the way that we live down here [in Louisiana], and I think a lot of them are very attracted to that because much of America has lost their sense of community." Powell expands, and in doing so helps explain why, amidst their exploration of idealized communities, revivalists strive to create a participatory community all their own:

> I think that a big problem in America today is a lot of people are feeling like they don't really belong to any given community. People are moving around like crazy. America, in some ways, is founded on the whole idea that it doesn't matter who you are or what your ancestors did—that any of that doesn't matter, this is starting anew, and it's very individualistic. In some ways, that's a great opportunity, but a generation or two down the line, you find people that are really lacking those roots. . . I think that's a gap in a lot of people's lives in America right now. I know it was in mine. I was raised in a college town with all the opportunities that are supposed to be exactly what every American wants, the American dream you know, . . . That opportunity to supposedly be anything you want doesn't really mean that much if you don't know where you're coming from in some ways.[20]

During the boom, this search for community and heritage through music involved collection, preservation, adaptation, creation, presentation and appreciation, in both the commercial and the non-profit spheres. All of these activities continue, but their present environment differs from that of the sixties in important ways. Folk activists of today, for example, pursue their activities within an established context, one derived from the earlier phenomenon. The great boom not only created or nurtured many of the institutional structures of the present scene; it also provides a reference point against which modern revivalists—including many still active sixties veterans—can assess their

practices. Artists and business people alike can evaluate ongoing discussion about the identity of the folk, the nature of a folksong, and the impact of commercial promotion, against the experience of a relatively recent past, and thus bring to that discussion a useful measure of practical experience. Such a perspective is extraordinarily helpful when negotiating a multi-faceted interest group that is extremely active, both intellectually and economically.

Another difference between the folk activism of yesterday and that of the present lies in the climate that surrounds that economic activity. Today, large, for-profit media interests no longer invest the word "folk" with meaningful commercial significance. There is no longer a regularly scheduled network television production that defines itself as a folk music showcase, such as ABC-TV's Hootenanny, which aired in 1963. Major record labels no longer market their releases as folk music and mass-market magazines no longer provide regular coverage of folk music events and personalities. The major media do pay periodic attention to musical forms encompassed by the sixties revival, such as blues or bluegrass, but they no longer focus on the concept of folk music per se, and the term, along with even limited discussion of its often hazy meaning, has slipped from public discourse. This both frustrates today's revivalists and imbues them with a sense of exclusivity that can border on the cliquish—two sometimes-competing reactions that help shape their activities.

Despite the relative disinterest of commercial giants, the ongoing folk revival encompasses a complex marketplace of interlocking commercial activity involving artists, agents, presenters, record labels, media and audience. It remains true, as Bruce Jackson noted years ago, that there are more folk festivals today than at the great boom's

commercial peak, and they are joined by countless specialty festivals devoted to bluegrass, blues, or "world" music, a catch-all term that encompasses much of what folk boom commentators once referred to as international or ethnic music. Though mass-market magazines no longer pay regular attention to the folk scene, there now exist a multitude of small but nationally distributed periodicals devoted to both the art and the business of tradition-based vernacular music. While major record labels no longer promote folk music as such, a new group of smaller record companies has arisen to replace the important, independent folk labels of the sixties that have either moved on to other styles or ceased operating. As the largest and most eclectic of these labels, Rounder Records of Cambridge, Massachusetts, best exemplifies the breadth of the modern folk scene and the problems inherent in commodifying that which many persist in considering non-commercial, community-based expression.

I will explore those problems more fully, but I note here that most of them stem from the romantic mist that has long surrounded the study of folk culture. At least as early as the mid-nineteenth century, scholars and aficionados alike have explored the identity of the "folk," the nature of their communities, the uniqueness of their artistic expression, and the supposed threat of their disappearance, with a tendency toward idealization that has submerged their subjects' complexity and thus their humanity. Only after the folk boom of the sixties had run its course did scholars in large numbers grapple explicitly with this tendency and begin to redefine both their terminology and their overall mission. Among the entrepreneurs who promote the appreciation of folk music within the broader world of mass culture, there exists the same tension between adherence to older, romantic constructs and awareness of a more realistic complexity. It

is a tension that serves a useful function, for while realistic complexity has much to offer the entrepreneur, the sense of romance that infuses the promotion of folk music is what gives the effort life and depth. It motivates the veritable army of adherents who help foster a broad awareness of vernacular artistry, despite the shifting nature of community identity and constant stylistic change.

Today's folk culture advocates, like those of the sixties and those of one hundred years ago, struggle against perceived loss in the face of social change. In the nineteenth century advocates feared the impact of national expansion, urbanization and industrialization. In the twenty-first century they fear the concentration of economic might and its tendency—based on a cold assessment of financial costs and benefits—to promote cultural forms that appeal to the greatest number, thereby squeezing out the idiosyncratic and the daring. In a world that seems—as always—obsessed with progress, these advocates ask us to recall and respect artifacts of the past and the community values that, they believe, fostered them. Despite folk music's leftist tinge, they are not political crusaders in the obvious sense. They do not, as a group, advocate the overthrow of existing governmental or economic structures—a stance that marks them as hopelessly naïve or dangerously counter-productive to the few who share the Marxist inclinations of earlier twentieth-century revivalists. Instead, they search those structures for space within which they can promote, through culture, an agenda of the local instead of the mass, the disenfranchised instead of the powerful, and the unique instead of the broadly popular.

If the word "revival" served as an imperfect but adequate sobriquet for the multi-faceted activities of the past, it continues to do so today. I use it and its variants as terms of art to signify the conscious promotion of traditionally based vernacular music and

derivative musical forms. Though the phrase "folk music" has passionate adherents, some contemporary fans and critics misunderstand or trivialize it. They see it, as I once did, as nothing more than a commercial label referring to solo singers accompanied by a lone acoustic guitar. These same commentators often embrace the term "roots music," a useful phrase that encompasses much of what the music industry called folk music two generations ago. I prefer "revival" and "folk" because they properly link contemporary activity to past practice. As they did during the great boom and as they have done for over 100 years, revivalists pursue the sometimes contradictory goals of preservation, creation and commercial promotion. Still romantics for the most part, they nonetheless bring to their efforts the hardheaded skills of the modern businessperson. Diversified in approach as always, they advance their cause through methods as old as word-of-mouth and as new as digital sound and the World Wide Web. Indeed, in many fundamental respects, today's folk activism is indistinguishable from that of the past, save for the present lack of interest from large commercial media. If the impact of that media rendered the sixties phenomenon a "great boom," today's activists pursue a quieter revival, one that labors more in the commercial shadows and is more willing to seek its converts one person at a time. The study of these eternally devoted revivalists reveals a great deal about Americans' never-ending fascination with their past, their on-going desire for a sense of community and their fierce—if sometimes hidden—resistance to cultural standardization.

This dissertation concerns music, an aural and emotional phenomenon that is notoriously difficult to describe in words. The fact that I am not a musician only compounds this difficulty. I lack the easy, almost intuitive familiarity with a musical

vocabulary that might allow me to describe adequately those features that make musical forms distinctive and distinguishable from one another. It is a common problem, one that I share with many folk fans. In a discussion of old-time American fiddling, a revival staple, musician Jeff Davis notes that "most people—the vast majority of the public—can't distinguish one tune from another or one style from another."[21] In the present context I trust that this problem is rendered unimportant, or at least mitigated, by the fact that I am not writing about musical forms as such, but about the social and psychological function of broad musical categories. Even the many folk fans who cannot discern one fiddler's bowing technique from another possess preferences that are both passionate and meaningful. A song's age and origin, the nature of its lyric, its instrumentation, the context of its performance and even the identity of its performer at a given moment all contribute to its acceptance or rejection by one revivalist faction or another. Indeed, musicians complain often that non-musicians revel in distinctions unimportant to the artists themselves, who are generally far more likely to tolerate artistic exploration than those drawn to folk music because of its implicit socio-cultural significance.

As my reference to "factions" suggests, I structure much of my discussion around controversies that roil the folk music world. This does not mean that I consider revivalists more prone to disagreement than any other passionate interest group. I find that on the whole they are remarkably tolerant of one another and tremendously concerned about locating common ground, with the hope that they will benefit from unity. Within the "folk press" and at Folk Alliance conferences, references to the "folk community" are frequent and sincere.[22] Still, ardent folk fans tend to be intelligent true believers who participate in revivalism precisely because they believe deeply in its potential to offer

meaning. In this quest for meaning they traverse constructs—such as heritage, tradition, authenticity and the idea of the folk itself—that are inherently ambiguous and thus subject to diverse, even shifting interpretations. Through their often-contentious disagreements, revivalists struggle to elucidate the multi-faceted nature of their passion, clarify their beliefs and highlight their often considerable commitment. In the end their ongoing debates enhance the value that music serves in their own lives and help strengthen the civic role of heritage, community and art.

In my next chapter I discuss the nineteenth century origin of the concept of "folklore" and survey that term's changing meaning in the face of industrialization and the rise of mass media. In Chapter 3 I examine the popular folksong revival of the mid-twentieth century, paying particular attention to the debate it engendered regarding the commingling of commerce and vernacular heritage. Following that I explore the impact of the folk revival and the counterculture on the founders of Rounder Records, illustrating how those back-to-back cultural phenomena contributed to a broad musical aesthetic that has influenced contemporary attitudes about the concept of tradition. I survey that aesthetic in Chapter Five and then, in Chapters Six and Seven, I closely analyze its influence in the cases of old-time country music and the Cajun music and zydeco that is indigenous to southern Louisiana. Chapter Eight explores the formation and maturation of the Folk Alliance, demonstrating how a group of contemporary revivalists are struggling to increase public understanding of and appreciation for folk music. I then examine the manner in which revivalists confront the challenges posed by growing corporate consolidation within the media and the music industry—challenges that exacerbate the difficult task of promoting a so-called community-based music in a

commercial context. I conclude with a brief forecast regarding the future of revivalism, attempting to predict the role of two-hundred-year-old constructs in the twenty-first century.

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[1] Program Book: 16th Annual International Folk Alliance Conference (San Diego, CA 2004), 2.

[2] Jeff Eilenberg, "What's Happening," Sing Out!, February/March/April 1993, 5.

[3] "Folk Frenzy," Time, 11 July 1960, 81. "It's Folksy. . . It's Delightful, It's A Craze," Newsweek, 6 June 1960, 112.

[4] Neil V. Rosenberg, "Introduction," in Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg, 1, 2 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[5] Sandy Paton, "Folk and the Folk Arrival," in The American Folk Scene: Dimensions of the Folksong Revival, ed. David A. De Turk and A. Poulin, Jr., 38 (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1967).

[6] Jane S. Becker, Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Robbie Lieberman, My Song Is My Weapon: People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); David E. Whisnant, All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

[7] Archie Green, "The Campus Folksong Club: A Glimpse at the Past," in Rosenberg, Transforming Tradition, 61, 66.

[8] On Phil Ochs generally, see Marc Eliot, Death Of A Rebel: A Biography Of Phil Ochs (New York: Anchor Books, 1979; reprint New York: Franklin Watts, 1989) and Michael Schumacher, There But For Fortune: The Life Of Phil Ochs (New York: Hyperion, 1996).

[9] For a discussion of the different performing styles of revival singers see Robert S. Whitman and Sheldon S. Kagen, "The Performance of Folksongs on Recordings," in De Turk and Poulin, The American Folk Scene, 72.

[10] I. Sheldon Posen, "On Folk Festivals and Kitchens: Questions of Authenticity in the Folksong Revival," in Rosenberg, Transforming Tradition, 127.

[11] Ibid., 133-134.

[12] Ibid., 136.

[13] Program Book: 5th Annual International Folk Alliance Conference (Tucson, AZ 1993), 6.

[14] For a concise survey of early country music duet singing see Charles Wolfe, In Close Harmony: The Story of The Louvin Brothers (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), "Close Harmony" (Chapter 2) passim.

[15] Kate Brislin & Katy Moffatt, Sleepless Nights, Rounder CD 0374. The liner notes, written by Randy Pitts, tell the story of the all-night Tucson singing session.

[16] For attendance figures see "Tucson '93: How Can I Keep From Singing," Folk Alliance Newsletter (Summer 1993), 1; "Folk Alliance Conference In Boston Surpasses All Records," Folk Alliance Newsletter (Summer 1994), 1.

[17] Bruce Jackson, "The Folksong Revival," New York Folklore Quarterly 11 (1985): 195, 201. Reprinted with modifications in Rosenberg, Transforming Tradition, 73.

[18] Gene Bluestein, Poplore: Folk And Pop In American Culture (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); Robert Cantwell, When We Were Good: The Folk Revival (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Ronald D. Cohen, Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Ronald D. Cohen, ed., Wasn't That a Time! Firsthand Accounts of the Folk Music Revival (Metchuen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995); Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Rosenberg, Transforming Tradition.

[19] I take the term "folk entrepreneur" from R. Serge Denisoff, "The Proletarian Renascence: The Folkness of the Ideological Folk," Journal of American Folklore 82 (January 1969): 51.

[20] Powell quotations are from Dirk Powell, interview by author. Christine Balfa quotation is from "Dirk Powell and Christine Balfa of Balfa Toujours," interview by Hadley Castille at <http://www.whatbayou.com/balfatoujours.html>, accessed on 7 June 2003.

[21] Jeff Davis, "Traditional," Folk Alliance Newsletter (July/August/September/October 2003), 17, 18.

[22] Scott Alarik, Deep Community: Adventures in the Modern Folk Underground (Cambridge, MA: Black Wolf Press, 2003).

2

WHEN THE RAILROAD MANIA WAS AT ITS HEIGHT
The Creation Of The Folk

> They've been looking for something new in the folk music field for a long time . . . and I think you've got it.—Announcer Frank Page, addressing 19-year old Elvis Presley on the stage of the now-fabled country music show "Louisiana Hayride," October 16, 1954.[1]

Not many people think of Elvis as a folk musician. When the great boom was at its peak he was in Hollywood starring in B-movies, far from the revival showcases of Greenwich Village. Frank Page's endorsement, however, illustrates both the confusion surrounding the nature of folk music and the concept's ongoing interaction with the mass culture industry. Speaking in 1980 after both Elvis and the boom had passed from the scene, quintessential revivalist Pete Seeger noted that the word "folksong" lacked any consistent meaning. "I really try not to use the word," he said. "I'd call it 'old songs' or "people's songs.'" Seeger is one of many who have stopped attempting to define both folk music and the broader concept of folklore, recognizing that such efforts run headlong into a quagmire of differing purposes and values, sometimes competing, sometimes not. Meanings held by academics, musicians, business people and the listening public converge and diverge in an atmosphere of interdependence, respect, mistrust, disdain and utter indifference. [2]

Though the elasticity of the term limits its descriptive value, the phrase "folk music"—Seeger notwithstanding—remains widely used by fervent revivalists. At a minimum it serves as convenient shorthand, alerting acolytes to the presence of artistic, cultural and sometimes political sympathizers. Thus Sing Out! magazine, a mainstay of the revival since 1950, carries the subtitle "Folk Music-Folk Songs," connecting it

instantaneously to a wide-ranging heritage. The cover of Dirty Linen, a periodical founded in the 1980s, trumpets its devotion to “Folk and World Music,” a linkage that joins often older revivalists to a younger audience, one unattached to the word “folk” but drawn to new pop music hybrids born of increasing globalism. So long as there exists a self-styled folk music scene, adherents ponder what falls within and what without. Among those who book folk clubs and host folk radio shows there is no rush to program either urban gangsta-rappers or suburban metal rockers. No matter how homegrown their sound, no matter how closely it is tied to specific communities, no matter how topical or anti-establishment their lyrics, there is no hue and cry to invite such performers inside the folk fold. Nor do the rappers and rockers seem to care. The Folk Alliance has hosted a single panel discussion on the folkloric nature of early hip-hop, but the hip-hoppers themselves are not among the hundreds of musicians plying their trade at the organization’s annual conferences.[3]

This largely pragmatic need for self-definition fuels seemingly never-ending discussion of "what is folk," which in turn prompts continued debate about the meaning and value of heritage, tradition, authenticity and commerce. Many activists revel in this often-contentious discourse, using it to identify, refine and advocate their own musical and cultural values. Not surprisingly the internet serves as the locus of much of this discussion. Electronic discussion groups devoted to folk music abound and the question of definition surfaces often. The Mudcat Cafe, an electronic bulletin board that specializes in "blues and folk music," hosts countless discussions touching upon the meaning of the central phrase—so many that its manager has tried to archive them collectively under the omnibus title "Threads on the Meaning of Folk." The simply

named "FolkMusic," a discussion list devoted to the contemporary, acoustic-based professional singer-songwriter, takes a different approach. Though such performers have been ubiquitous among revivalists for decades, many persist in excluding them from the category of "true" folk singers. Unwilling to see his list consumed by endless debate, wanting simply to get on with discussing the particular artistry he admires, the manager of this list expressly prohibits argument on the point. He handles offending messages by returning them to the sender, unseen by the membership as a whole. The Folk Alliance, though devoted to folk music in all its myriad forms, maintains an official refusal to define the term that provides its name, fearful of discouraging potential members.[4]

When revivalists do discuss the nature of folk music in present-day America, someone notes inevitably that spontaneous, non-professional group performance is now exceedingly difficult to find outside the context of worship. Few of us know families who sing together and, in the homes of all but our poorest citizens, multiple television sets and radios, joined today by MP3 players and electronic game consoles, divide family members, pulling each toward individual forms of packaged, usually passive, entertainment. Similarly, few among us have any direct exposure to occupational songs such as the mining tunes that avocational folklorist George Korson collected in the Pennsylvania coalfields as late as the 1960s. Our city streets do not ring with the songs of the urban sanitation worker; the tunes of the toll collector form no part of the cacophony at our highway interchanges. In the 1930s the Lomaxes explored southern prisons searching for long isolated performers, free from the mass media's growing influence. Today prisoners form rock and rap bands, covering popular songs they learned from the radio. In a world dominated by media and mobility, where scholars and entrepreneurs

have seemingly cataloged every once unknown song and style, revivalists struggle to locate that which they celebrate as folk music.[5]

Recognizing that they are self-aware promoters of an ideal, very few revivalists cling to the early formulation of a folksong as an anonymous composition passed on through community tradition. Those who honor that early definition generally see it as a valued analytical starting point, while acknowledging the need for modification to allow for the existence of a contemporary, living folk music. A few continue to exalt only the most ancient of songs. Others accept new compositions but favor those that sound like older forms, with a preferential nod given to styles anchored in the heritage of marginalized communities. Still others, caught up in the revival's linkage of folk music and the left, characterize a song as folk if it conveys some social message. A participant in an internet discussion devoted to the question of whether the commercially successful performer Jewel is a folk or pop singer concluded that she is a folk singer when she sings songs that address social issues and, presumably, a pop singer the rest of the time. [6] For those who see electricity and volume as symbolic of the modern media and the star system, a folk song is a quiet song, performed on acoustic instruments. Whenever this discussion surfaces, it is almost certain that some relatively uninitiated participant will spark groans by offering the old bromide, attributed most often to bluesman Big Bill Broonzy, which holds, "I guess all songs are folk songs. I never heard a horse sing one."

Many revivalists revel in their own communities of folk song aficionados, which serve as a substitute for the idealized communities from which the construct of the folk emerged. For these seekers of fellowship, low volume and spare instrumentation serve as a means to an old fashioned end. A relatively simple acoustic arrangement lends itself to

audience participation, allowing the dedicated amateurs who populate the revival's song circles and jam sessions to perform it in a comfortably collective fashion. Mark Moss, long-time editor of Sing Out!, favors a definition that takes explicit account of such community-building ends, holding that "the true vein that defines folk music [is] participation." Though acknowledging the value of formal concerts and other "consumption type" events, he maintains that "continual informal singing and playing coupled with dances, family and kids' stuff, for me, comes the closest to the 'community' basis on which all folk arts are based."[7] Moss speaks fondly of the annual Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas, a three-week long, self-described singer-songwriter's festival that draws campers from around the nation. People stay for a few days or a few weeks and many never watch the featured attractions on stage. Instead they perform their own contemporary "semi-pop" songs with old and new friends in an atmosphere of "community sharing." "I defy you," Moss says, "to make an argument that that is less folk music" than the old songs deified by early scholars. Unwedded to any particular stylistic approach, he also refuses to characterize electricity and amplification as a dividing line between folk and "not-folk." The only reason that early folklorists did not find informants who played electric Casio keyboards, he insists, is because the instrument had not yet been invented. To Moss such keyboards are the dulcimers of the modern age. Widely accessible, relatively inexpensive and easy to carry, they are perfect for the informal music making that forms the essence of folksong.[8]

To the dismay of many, this thoughtful discussion goes on within a popular environment that often dismisses anything labeled "folk" as either a quaint vestige of the sixties or an even more ancient artifact that survives only because of its historical interest

to a few devotees. The New York Times has characterized a thriving coffeehouse scene in New York State's Hudson River valley as an anachronistic throwback to a faded era, complete with carrot cake and cider. "I guess we're a bunch of old lefties," said one participant. "We're all sort of refugees from the 60s," added another. Aiming more broadly, journalist Don McLeese describes "folklife" as "stuff that couldn't survive a single afternoon if it had to depend on its own entertainment value." Casting his lot with those "entranced by the trash, dazzle and vitality of popular culture," he finds folk music more akin to macrobiotics and enemas—"bad experiences that are supposed to be good for you." New York's Village Voice, after a brief bow to the idea of grassroots culture, pigeonholes the music that has "come to be known as 'folk' [as] generally soft, inoffensive acoustic guitar-based mush." Music journalist Jon Pareles echoes this theme with his own comment on Jewel, whom he lumps with a cluster of unnamed songwriters who indulge in "folkie psychobabble." In an article on singer, songwriter and fiddler Eliza Carthy, the daughter of two well-known pioneers in the revival of British traditional music, Pulse seems determined to have it both ways by taking positive advantage of her personal revival roots while avoiding folk's contemporary image, which the magazine—perhaps correctly—considers a commercial kiss of death. Stressing her nose ring, turquoise hair and a sound that "ain't your father's folkie music," Pulse assures us that Carthy is an "alterna-folk iconoclast" who "takes folk into a pop-friendly millennium for a new generation that didn't grow up with Dylan and hootenannies." "Think folk music is for old fogies; that fiddlers are fusty?" Pulse asks. "Think again."[9]

Devoted folk fans consider all of this nonsense and object to a press that did not understand revivalism in the sixties and does not understand it today. The Boston Herald

summarizes much current sentiment in a headline that reads, "Clueless: Mainstream Media Gets Folk Wrong, Over and Over." The accompanying article bemoans both the failure to comprehend the diversity of the scene and the ongoing fascination with stars such as Dylan, whom few have considered a folk singer for 40 years. The Folk Alliance—with a philosophy that embraces Dylan, Eliza Carthy and a whole lot more—hopes to counter these negative images and to communicate the vibrancy and thoroughly pluralistic nature of contemporary folk music. As folk activists grapple with how best to present themselves to the wider world, debate and dissension abound. Staunch preservationists and cultural defenders dismiss ambitious musical innovators as pretenders, sometimes even using the ostensibly neutral descriptor "revivalist" as a pejorative. Country fiddlers, blues guitarists and others whose performing style seems linked to older musical roots complain about "singer-songwriters," itself a pejorative reserved for the James Taylor clones who purvey the "mush" and "psychobabble" that seems unconnected to any past other than the composer's own. Those same singer-songwriters, resenting this derision, are among those complaining of fusty fiddlers and sixties throwbacks.[10]

Such discord is hardly new and is in no way limited to commercial popularizers. For well over a century scholars have struggled to define folklore and to come to terms with its interaction with the mass media. In 1949 the editors of a standard academic reference work eschewed a single definition in favor of allowing 21 contributors to offer 21 individual points-of-view.[11] Two decades further along, folklorist Jan Brunvand noted that the "basic definition of folklore has not yet been formulated to anyone's complete satisfaction," resulting in a discipline that seems to be "going in circles."[12] Almost three

decades beyond that, in his own exhaustive reference work, Brunvand approached the task by acknowledging uncertainty and citing that now well-settled article of academic faith which holds that the process of cultural analysis requires that any definition take into account who is studying whom, "plus how, why, and for whose advantage . . ."[13] Indeed, in the more than 150 years since its first formal expression of purpose, the discipline of folklore has witnessed a theoretical upending so pervasive that in 1998 the Journal of American Folklore devoted an entire issue to the question of whether scholars should abandon the word "folklore." "Is 'folklore,'" the Journal asked, "still a useful and appropriate way of describing the work we do and the area of culture that intrigues us?"[14] The underlying ambiguities have led folklorist Roger Abrahams to refer to his chosen field as "a complex cultural fiction."[15] Echoing this theme, other commentators have noted the existence of a constructed "idea of the folk"[16] or written sarcastically of "once upon a time [when] there was a place called traditional society."[17]

Looking back at generations of field collecting, indexing and anthologizing, most close observers, myself included, have come to understand that there never existed any pure, unmediated, unselfconscious folk music, springing organically from the collective consciousness of isolated American communities. The tunes and lyrics that comprise the American folk music canon stem from varied sources, foreign and domestic, and blend ancient songs of unknown origin, locally composed material created for purposes of entertainment, commentary or ritual, and wholly commercial products disseminated through traveling shows and, later, radio and records. Those who compiled this canon possessed personal agendas governing their often idiosyncratic decisions about what to include, rendering their efforts less an exercise in canon preservation than in canon

construction. Consequently, contemporary scholars generally adopt the approach of Regina Bendix, who wrote—and I paraphrase—the crucial questions to be answered are not "what is folk music?" but "who needs folk music and why?" and "how has folk music been used?"[18]

Despite these conceptual difficulties, the discipline of folklore does possess a core terminology, subject matter and set of values. While scholars ponder their professional identity, that core continues to exert a powerful hold on many drawn to indigenous musical expression. Thus, despite challenges posed by social change and unimagined technological innovation, the principles that motivated fledgling folklorists more than a century ago continue to influence the present-day dissemination and reception of what the music industry calls folk music. That in turn has often puzzled and sometimes angered academic folklorists. While many giants of the field have directed their scholar's eye comfortably toward the efforts of entrepreneurial or avocational revivalists, others have treated revivalism as something akin to an overly intrusive in-law—they recognize that it bears some relationship to folklore but they don't really want it in the house. Folklorist Gene Bluestein expresses the conundrum in discussing the reaction of conservative scholars to revival giants Seeger and Woody Guthrie. "While academic critics may have grudgingly admired their work," he writes, "its alleged contamination by pop traditions has put them in a sort of limbo. They have obviously done something with folk material, but what they have done is difficult to evaluate within the obsolete definitions of folklore still in vogue."[19]

My own analysis suggests that Bluestein overstates the case. Scholarly folklorists and revivalists have influenced one another for quite some time. Folklore's disciplinary

core provides revivalists not only with a subject matter and a vocabulary but also with the intellectual and emotional framework that drives their activities. Revivalists, in turn, have pushed folklorists to broaden the "obsolete definitions" of which Bluestein complains. This process, which has accelerated since the end of the boom, has enhanced our ability to accept the manner in which the for-profit media advance indigenous artistry and has encouraged the creation and commercial promotion of some truly wonderful and diverse music. While a detailed disciplinary history of folklore, which would overwhelm my present subject, can be found elsewhere, a full understanding of current revivalism demands some appreciation of folklore's scholarly core and its shifting path, along which theory pursues such diverse strands as urbanization, industrialization, political activism and the growth of the music industry. This, in turn, compels us to start at a point that is both germane to the task at hand and upon which there is reasonable agreement—if not a definitive beginning, at least an accurate and utilitarian one. [20]

Englishman William John Thoms coined the word "folklore" in 1846 in a pseudonymous letter to The Athenaeum, a British periodical. A lifelong civil servant, Thoms was also an active antiquarian who was a Fellow of Britain's Society of Antiquaries and for 34 years the Secretary of its local Camden affiliate.[21] Avocationally, he compiled and published anthologies that collected the myths and legends of his native land. He offered the term—which he hyphenated as "folk-lore"—as a more encompassing substitute for such then conventional phrases as "popular antiquities" and "popular literature." Fearing the loss of the "Lore of the People," he urged The Athenaeum to solicit examples of such lore, which he identified as the "manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc., of the olden time." His brief letter made clear that he

derived his motivation from a perceived need to rescue such material from imminent disappearance. Reflecting upon the amount of lore that was already "entirely lost," he encouraged the gathering and preservation of that which "may yet be rescued by timely exertion." In a retrospective account of his creation written in 1876, Thoms confirmed that advancing modernity spurred him on, noting that he acted "when the railroad mania was at its height, and the iron horse was trampling under foot all our ancient landmarks, and putting to flight all the relics of our earlier popular mythology . . ."[22]

North America experienced dramatic social change in the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1845 New York journalist John O'Sullivan issued the jingoistic declaration that pronounced it the "manifest destiny" of the U.S. to "overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."[23] That same year saw a dramatic adjustment in the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. Texas punctuated its earlier departure from the latter by joining the Union. California, also former Mexican territory, followed suit in 1846, the year in which the U.S. and Mexico went to war. Roughly simultaneously, the Oregon Treaty with Britain finalized the border between the U.S. and Canada. Over the course of the next generation, the U.S. government and allied commercial interests launched a de facto war against the Plains Indians, while the Civil War ended slavery. In 1869 the completion of the first transcontinental rail line symbolized both the subjugation of the Native American and the industrialization of the American west. In 1881, as Jim Crow laws began to take hold in the south, famed Sioux warrior Sitting Bull surrendered to the U.S. Government. Five years later, U.S. forces captured and jailed Geronimo, Chief of the Apache.

By 1888, against the backdrop of these varied socio-political markers, Thoms' neologism and his purpose had taken firm hold of scholars in the U. S. That year, the founders of the newly created American Folk-Lore Society (AFS) called for the preservation of "the fast-vanishing remains" of folklore in America. Bemoaning the perils of growth, urbanization and homogenization, the maiden issue of the Society's Journal of American Folk-Lore (JAF) urged exploration of the "older and more retired towns" in search of the vanishing products of "the quiet past," before they were "absorbed into the uniformity of the written language." With a self-defining bow to the "mother country" the Journal called explicitly for the salvation of "Old English" lore, "once the inheritance of every speaker of the English tongue." Forecasting the folklorist's continuing fascination with those outside the mainstream, the Journal also displayed a strong interest in the cultural products of all those marginalized—politically, economically and socially—by political consolidation and rapid industrialization. In doing so it helped define "the folk" as the dispossessed and the powerless, contrasting them implicitly with the presumably more enlightened, more educated and certainly more powerful would-be saviors of their legacy. [24]

Today scholars debate whether interest in the folk fosters empowerment or constitutes ongoing objectification by cultural colonizers.[25] In the late nineteenth century, however, it was a desire for historical completeness that motivated the developing field of folklore, far more than any hope that cultural preservation might strengthen the hand of those on the socio-political margins. The JAF saw the collection of Native-American lore, for example, as necessary to save an "essential part of history" and to "provide a complete representation of the savage mind." Though the Journal approved of civilizing

opportunities for "the sake of the Indians themselves," its prime motivation was to ensure "that a complete history should remain of what they have been, since their picturesque and wonderful life will soon be absorbed and lost in the uniformity of the modern world." The Journal assumed that it would soon be impossible to determine the origin of the stories and songs of the Negro. It urged prompt action to preserve whatever pertinent information remained, connected as it was "with the history of a race who, for good or ill, are henceforth an indissoluble part of the body politic of the United States."[26]

With these endeavors the paramount rationale governing the nineteenth century search for folklore took shape—the belief that it was the endangered product of a marginalized and rapidly vanishing "peasantry," one consisting of the "agrarian, [the] semi-literate, [and the] hand-skilled."[27] Citing Henry David Thoreau's cry against all "modern and ingenious sciences and arts," Dillon Bustin links the anti-modernism at the heart of the fascination with folk culture to the romantic transcendentalists of mid-nineteenth-century New England. In his call for mankind to "simplify, simplify," Thoreau maligned both growing industrialism and the large-scale capitalism that drove it, which he saw as creating conditions as horrific as those then known to exist in British factories. In his sweeping condemnation of complexity in all its guises, Thoreau attacked "so-called internal improvements," such as the railroad and a sophisticated postal system, as "external and superficial . . . an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture, and tripped up by its own traps." As part of this paean to simplicity, he bemoaned the loss of those cottage industries that once surrounded his beloved Walden Woods, the "basket, stable-broom, mat-making, corn-starching, linen-spinning, and

pottery businesses" that produced what commentators would now call the elements of folklife.[28]

The line between idealization and derision, however, could be a fine one. In romantic terms the folk were unspoiled, pastoral and close to nature. More pejoratively, those same folk were backward, superstitious and illiterate. Modern man used machines and instruments of mass communication, indicators of a life that was urban, industrial, literate, rational and scientific. The folk, by contrast, relied on handicrafts and word of mouth. Modern man, in short, was central to the new, urban, industrial society of the late nineteenth century, while the folk were increasingly superfluous. In the end, given the inevitability of change and the folklorists' self-definition as men of "science," even the ostensibly positive descriptors carried the whiff of paternalism. Cutting close to the early scholarly bone, Barre Toelken has stressed the significance of the rural-urban dichotomy, noting sardonically that the folk were rural and the folklorists urban.[29]

Though early folklore scholarship raised various themes that suffuse the discipline to this day—including anti-modernism, romanticism and colonialism—definitional uncertainty existed from the outset. At times folklorists have defined their subject by reference to specific objects of study. Thus, "folklore" came to consist of the things Thoms mentioned—such as superstitions, ballads, and proverbs—and other things that seemed somehow similar, such as myths, legends and riddles. Unfortunately, the mere itemization of varied textual types reveals nothing about the relationship that those items have to one another. Early on, the search for a clear unifying principle centered upon the idea of the "traditional." While avoiding any overriding definition, the maiden issue of the JAF noted "that what distinguishes in common the numerous subjects included under

the name 'folk-lore' is their character of oral tradition."[30] The focus on orality stems from two impulses. To a degree, it affirms the primitive status of those studied, who did not necessarily avail themselves of modern means of communication or record keeping. More importantly, it helps define the concept of tradition itself, by emphasizing texts and behavior so enmeshed within a culture that they do not warrant codification. Obsessed with preservation of the threatened, our earliest folklorists gave tradition a core nineteenth-century meaning that situated the past and modernity as "polar opposites."[31] They consequently associated tradition with "survivals," or customs that "have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original homes, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved."[32]

Through periodic reappraisal, tradition remains at the heart of folklore studies. Stith Thompson observes that the "common idea present in all folklore is that of tradition, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record." Stressing the manner in which folklore presumably exemplifies community, as opposed to individual, identity, Archer Taylor writes, "Folklore consists of materials that are handed on traditionally from generation to generation without a reliable ascription to an inventor or author." Using language even more holistic, MacEdward Leach calls tradition "the accumulated knowledge of a homogenous unsophisticated people."[33] Writing in 1979 Kay L. Cothran refers to tradition as the "context of context," the backdrop that gives form and meaning to individual activity and community discourse. More colloquially, she calls it simply "our way, our means, our category, our system."[34] What these formulations have in common is

the desire to understand a way of life as opposed to an individual interest, a passing group fancy or a ruling-class dictate. In short, they seek to glimpse a community's deep-seated "preoccupations and values."[35]

Today it is axiomatic that cultures are not static entities but living organisms that modify their customs over time, a process that stems in part from ongoing, cross-cultural interaction. None of the groups highlighted by the JAF in 1888 lived in total isolation and inter-group contact resulted inevitably in an alteration of customs, beliefs and texts that revealed itself only gradually. In his study of European/Native American contact in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, historian William Cronon concludes that, so far as this particular encounter was concerned, the "erasure of boundaries" was perhaps the "most important issue of all."[36] Thus, by the time the AFS arose to help preserve Native American "survivals," such supposedly indigenous customs already reflected two centuries of Anglo/Indian interaction. In recognition of this reality, the concept of tradition encompasses not only a body of customary behavior or expression—"the traditions of a people"—but a process—"the tale handed down by popular tradition"—that presumes change as an integral component of its nature even if that change occurs through the crossing of perceived cultural boundaries.[37]

Incorporating both the idea of custom—that which is understood, accepted and repeated—and process—that which travels and varies through space and time—Henry Glassie calls tradition "the creation of the future out of the past." The corollary to this definition holds that change by itself is never antithetical to the existence of strong traditions. Tradition, Glassie explains, is the opposite of change only in those instances where the "disruption is so complete that the new cannot be read as an innovative

adaptation of the old," and thus suggests enormous and often abrupt social disruption. As Glassie puts it, "a clean break followed by novelty implies replacement, hints of violence; one tradition has gone, another has come."[38] The more gradual, long-term change associated with tradition may proceed at times so slowly or quietly that it creates the illusion of stasis, while at other times it may display a momentarily dizzying fluidity. Often, it is only through a retrospective glance that an observer can determine the impact or existence of change. Though Glassie's analysis was unavailable to nineteenth- century folklorists, they feared that the heady rush to conquer and modernize that marked North American development constituted, in many instances, the complete disruption that served as tradition's enemy.

Tradition's companion is "authenticity," a multi-layered construct that at its most elemental refers to the extent to which a text or behavior accurately replicates some ideal exemplar. In the world of contemporary folk music, revivalists might measure the authenticity of an Appalachian ballad by determining whether that particular lyric story was actually circulating within Appalachia at a chosen point in time, presumably before "outsiders" managed to alter purely indigenous culture. A deeper inquiry might analyze the particular vocal style used in performance to establish whether it conforms to stylistic elements that were an indigenous part of the community and time being examined. Deeper still lies the determination of whether the song reflects something of the nature of that community. If one seeks preservation of the engrained raw material of indigenous community life, one must locate that which is truly an innate part of community identity, avoiding the inauthenticity of that which is imposed or merely ephemeral. Given these constraints, a determination of authenticity is often heavily dependant upon a precise

understanding of many variables, among them lyrics, tune, style, setting and purpose of presentation, the precise identity of the community in question and the performer's connection to that community, the community values examined, the determination of what constitutes an outside influence and the extent to which the seeker of authenticity tolerates such influences.[39]

The nineteenth-century quest for authenticity was hardly the sole province of folklorists or of intellectuals in general. In the words of Bendix, it represented a broad-based modernist reaction to "urban manners, artifice in language, behavior, and art, and against aristocratic excess." Like Bustin, she finds raw material for this intellectual stance in the work of the literary romantics, emphasizing the value they placed on unmediated experience, intuition and unspoiled nature.[40] T. Jackson Lears documents a parallel yearning among a relatively affluent professional class. Faced with increasing regimentation in all aspects of life—Lears points out that the phrase "on-time" arose in the 1870s—and troubled emotionally by their growing reliance upon newly available creature comforts, financially satisfied urban Americans turned backward to embrace a more rigorous past, one in which people were connected more directly to the essential aspects of their day-to-day survival. One manifestation of this phenomenon arose in the so-called "Arts and Crafts" movement, which celebrated, tangibly, handmade wooden furniture emblematic of a pre-industrial era and, intangibly, the personal, hands-on involvement that created such artifacts in the first place. Through clubs, popular journals and home woodworking shops, weekend craftsmen could imagine a spiritual connection to romanticized forebears who, working in considerably less comfort, had used handtools to clear the forests where cities now stood.[41]

As Lears sees it, this yearning for connection with an idealized pre-industrial past was an attempt at psychological accommodation by anxious middle and upper-class Americans, worried about growing physically soft but hardly willing to surrender newly obtained luxuries made possible by modernity.[42] Like the casual woodworkers who may have been their neighbors, early folklorists were not only powerless to halt the forces of change but not necessarily interested in doing so. Ensconced in universities and intent upon building professional careers, a position not incompatible with genuine concern, they wrestled with those fine lines traversing admiration, longing, distance and paternalism. Inevitably they resigned themselves to the disappearance of some living traditions and sought to preserve heritage within the pages of learned journals and the glass walls of museum cases. Their work, which constitutes a priceless contribution to culture, is infused with a strange linkage between romanticism—with its desire for emotional connection to a receding past—and the supposedly rational, undoubtedly modernist drive for a "scientific" discipline that could collect, codify and, at least to that limited extent, salvage threatened exemplars of "peasant" life.

Paramount among those early American folklorists was Francis James Child, a Harvard literature professor whose work helped establish the tone of the emerging discipline and survived to become a "touchstone" of late-twentieth-century revivalism. Initially a Shakespearean scholar, Child's life work ultimately centered upon his other passion, the British ballad, which he identified as a "narrative song, a short tale in lyric verse." Child was interested in the ballad as literature, not as a key to unlocking the secrets of community life. For approximately 40 years, until his death in 1896, he devoted himself to collecting English and Scottish ballad texts. He was not, however,

interested in just any such tale. Possessed of a strong bias for the ancient, he exalted the literary qualities of the earliest extant texts and discerned some drastic qualitative decline once the printing press allowed for a thriving business in commercial balladry. These post-industrial ballads were, he believed, "a different genus" from those he treasured. Produced either by or for "the ignorant and unschooled mass," they were "products of a low kind of art, and most of them are, from a literary point of view, thoroughly despicable and worthless." Thus, to ensure the value of his collection, he focused upon texts created before 1475, the year the printing press arrived in Britain. Given this approach, Child avoided living informants. There was too great a possibility that they might pass on a lyric corrupted by the commercial influences of the preceding 400 years. Instead, helped by a network of researchers in the British Isles, he scoured private collections and other archival sources for handwritten ballad texts that had survived for centuries.[43]

Child was so thorough, and he kept at it for so long, that he eventually located 1300 variants of 305 separate titles. Between 1882 and 1898, he—or his posthumous successors—published these texts in a ten-volume collection entitled The British and Scottish Popular Ballads.[44] Though Child published textual variants, he sought only those that in his estimation occurred naturally, as the ballad was sung by and spread among the British populace. He criticized harshly previous collectors who appeared to have altered texts, characterizing the results as "modernized," "twaddling" and "entirely worthless." Yet, in a contradiction that proved remarkably common, he did trust his own alterations. In a few instances, he, to use his words, "greatly improved" the original text. He also at times omitted those stanzas he considered "tasteless." Offended by bawdy material, he

did not seek it out and it is consequently underrepresented in his collection.[45] Still, Child's achievement is real and the single-mindedness of his passion, the enormity and uniqueness of his collection, the decades he spent in its pursuit, the thoroughness of his documentation and even his affiliation with Harvard combined to give his work tremendous credibility. Its influence was immediate and long lasting. During the great boom, many newly professional folk singers included Child Ballads—as they were known—in their repertoires, drawn by their beauty but also by the multiple attractions of antiquity, unknown origin and scholarly gloss. In a typically snide—but not altogether untrue—reference to the revival, Time magazine reported in 1962 that "Folkupmanship absolutely requires that a ballad be referred to as Child 12, Child 200, or Child 209," rather than by the actual name of the song.[46]

In light of later debates about the meaning and value of authenticity, it is important to realize that Child's textual alterations were consistent with earlier practice. In the 1760s James Macpherson compiled and published several anthologies of supposedly traditional Scottish verse, producing an influential collection known as the Ossian poems. Throughout Europe, the collection stimulated tremendous interest in the poetry of the common man, providing a counterpoint to the intellectual hold of the classical models of ancient Greece and Rome. Almost immediately, however, other scholars challenged the authenticity of the work, ultimately demonstrating that Macpherson—without acknowledging his actions—had combined verses to produce composite texts, adding and deleting as he pleased. The famed Grimm brothers of Germany, hailed as pioneering figures in the field of folklore, engaged in similar practices in compiling their well-known collections of tales, first published in 1812.

Clearly appreciating the perceived value of authenticity, the Grimms claimed that "we have endeavored to present these fairy-tales as purely as possible . . . no circumstance has been added or embellished or changed. . ." This assertion, however, was false, and scholars later demonstrated the extent of the Grimms' fairly heavy editorial hand. Still, like the Ossian verse, their collection was hugely influential. Commentators lionized it as a "German national monument," and it "sparked a virtual intellectual revolution, spurring would-be folklorists in many countries to gather their own local traditions."[47] McPherson and the Grimms demonstrated that a folkloric text could have significant cultural impact, despite not being scrupulously true to its origin.

In the U.S. collecting accelerated rapidly in the twentieth century. British scholar Cecil Sharp was one early folklorist who sought to build upon Child's accomplishment by documenting the prevalence of English ballads among the citizens of the American Appalachian Mountains. In three trips spanning the years 1916 to 1918, Sharp—using oral informants of the type Child had spurned—"collected more than 1600 versions of 500 songs from 281 singers, almost all British-derived material."[48] Sharp shared the preservationist instincts that motivated his countryman, William Thoms and the founders of the AFS. In his journeys to America, he saw himself as documenting the survivals of an idealized old England, one that had disappeared in the face of rampant industrialization. He helped solidify the image of the romantic Appalachian mountaineer, whom he considered "just exactly what the English peasant was one hundred or more years ago." He praised the mountain folk for their "elemental wisdom, abundant knowledge, and intuitive understanding" drawn from a life lived "in constant touch with Nature and face-to-face with reality." It was a reality that Sharp found far removed "from

that continuous, grinding, mental pressure due to the attempt 'to make a living' from which all of us in the modern world suffer." "Here," he wrote, in Appalachia, "no one is 'on the make' and social rivalries are unknown." Ignoring the realities of hard work and hardship, Sharp, in Benjamin Filene's pithy observation, "made the mountaineers' closeness to nature sound less like subsistence poverty than like an ascetic philosophy." [49] His idyllic picture of a pastoral wonderland populated by figurative noblemen, unscathed by the evils of modernity and ringing with the sound of Child ballads spontaneously sung, has exerted a powerful hold on the ongoing folk revival.

Among other early collectors whose work endured to influence generations of revivalists, none stands taller than John Avery Lomax. Born in Mississippi in 1867, Lomax grew up in Texas where he developed an early appreciation for the old ballads and regional tunes sung by neighbors and traveling musicians. In 1906, after various educational endeavors and a stint as registrar at the University of Texas, Lomax entered Harvard as a fairly late-blooming graduate student. Enrolled in the English Department, he responded to Professor Barrett Wendell's call for research into regional literature by proposing a paper devoted to songs that cowboys "made up" while they worked. This proposal so intrigued Wendell that he introduced Lomax to Professor George Lyman Kittredge, who periodically taught a Harvard course based upon Child's ballad studies. Kittredge took the project to heart and enlisted the help of the Harvard Press, which printed 1000 copies of a song solicitation. In April 1907, Lomax mailed this initial solicitation to newspaper editors throughout the west, requesting songs that would "epitomize and particularize the life of the pioneers who peopled the vast region west of the Mississippi River." Adhering to established standards defining authentically

traditional lore, he sought material that, "like the Masonic ritual, are handed down from one generation to another by 'word of mouth.'"[50]

Lomax's efforts resulted in the 1910 publication of his now classic Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads, a book arguably responsible for the preservation of many American standards, including "Buffalo Skinners," "Git Along, Little Dogies" and, most famously, "Home on the Range." Lomax's emotional connection to folklore's romantic, anti-modernist tenets is plain, as is his fascination with the old England of Child. He describes his geographic focal point as "the wild, far-away places of the big and still unpeopled west," a region where there "yet survives the Anglo-Saxon ballad spirit that was active in secluded districts in England and Scotland . . ." In this mythic terrain, isolation "created a spirit of hospitality, primitive and hearty as that found in the mead-halls of Beowulf." Lomax sees the "unique and romantic" cowboys who roam this land as authentic primitives. "Illiterate . . . isolated and lonely," they are "thrown back on primal resources for entertainment and for the expression of emotion . . ." Necessarily focused on survival, they have "always been on the skirmish line of civilization." Accentuating the aura of romance, Lomax describes his subjects as "dauntless, reckless, without the unearthly purity of Sir Galahad though as gentle to a pure woman as King Arthur . . . truly a knight of the twentieth century." Like those other knights from distant lands and ages, Lomax's cowboy was also disappearing:

> The big ranches of the west are now being cut up into small farms. The nester has come, and come to stay. Gone is the buffalo, the Indian warwhoop, the free grass of the open plain;—even the stinging lizard, the horned frog, the centipede, the prairie dog, the rattlesnake, are fast disappearing. Save in some of the secluded valleys of southern New Mexico, the old-time roundup is no more; the trails to Kansas and Montana have become grass-grown or lost

> in the fields of waving grain; the maverick steer, the regal longhorn had been supplanted . . . The changing and romantic West of the early days lives mainly in story and in song. [51]

Lomax offered a description of cowboy life so vivid that one could believe that he collected songs while actually riding the range, branding cattle and battling rustlers. He states explicitly that the songs "as a rule have been taken down from oral recitation" and describes them as being "jotted down on a table in the rear of a saloon, scrawled on an envelope while squatting about a campfire, caught behind the scenes of a broncho-busting outfit."[52] Perhaps someone initially captured the songs in this manner but it was not likely to have been Lomax. His biographer Nolan Porterfield describes Lomax's scholarship as "roughshod" and his actual fieldwork as "rudimentary," consisting of relatively few interviews conducted at "sporadic intervals."[53] For the most part, the songs came from newspapers, library archives and through the mail, provided by those responding to Lomax's several printed solicitations. Often Lomax had no idea if a song had ever existed purely in oral tradition. He included songs that he knew had been published in newspapers as well as some that had definite authorship. When it suited his aesthetic he altered texts and combined variants readily, seeking the subjectively "best" lyric narrative. Unlike some predecessors, he acknowledged this. "Frankly," he explained, "the volume is meant to be popular."[54] Conversely, when confronted with evidence that a song was less than an absolutely authentic product of the range—such as a lyric's erroneous description of cowboy gear—he defended by insisting upon textual purity. Lomax's approach was little different from that of Child and Sharp. Each anthologized that which he liked and which served his particular preservationist ethic. Each omitted

that which he disliked. The result in each case was the same—the preservation of valuable cultural artifacts that might otherwise have been lost. "Home on the Range" had an identifiable composer and its lyric had once appeared in a newspaper. Nonetheless, the song was obscure. Had Lomax recorded only texts that circulated solely within oral tradition, it might have disappeared forever. [55]

If Lomax, with his connection to Harvard and its heritage of Child's ballad collecting, saw tension between the scholarly and the popular, other early twentieth century song collectors assuredly did not. Beginning around 1920, scouts seeking commercial opportunity on behalf of the fledgling record industry sought potential stars in disparate pockets of the U.S. Today scholars recognize these industry pioneers as "unwitting folklorists" who played a seminal role in preserving the songs and song styles favored by rural Americans at the dawn of the twentieth century.[56] At the time the repertoire of many locally based, rural musicians consisted necessarily of songs learned largely through oral tradition. This did not, however, mean that the songs themselves were merely the survivals of dying or foreign cultures. Belief in the absolute isolation of rural Americans is little more than an urban conceit. Even in the century's earliest decades, people traveled into and out of relatively isolated regions, and tunes, whether written down or not, moved with them. Many rural residents learned songs from professional performers affiliated with traveling tent shows. Then, whether through wholly informal singing within families or through quasi-professional entertainment, they passed them to others. Some songs were indeed old British ballads; some were hymns; still others were minstrel or vaudeville tunes. To the listeners and to many of the performers, they were simply "anonymous."

Most early rural entertainers were residents of the communities in which they performed—farmers or laborers who played for their neighbors at community social gatherings. Those with a more commercial orientation sometimes sought prizes at fiddle contests, drummed up crowds on behalf of retailers or politicians, or performed on street corners in return for loose change.[57] With the rise of radio and recording in the 1920s, it was not long before all concerned recognized the new business opportunities—and the new modes of living—that technology placed within reach. The more ambitious performers realized that the new media could help them expand their audience and earn a living from their art. Correspondingly, media executives understood that these local musicians provided a relatively inexpensive talent pool through which they could build commercial opportunity. Performing at an Atlanta fiddle competition in July 1923, "Fiddlin' John" Carson sold a number of his newly recorded discs to eager audience members, while reportedly remarking, "I'll have to quit making moonshine and start making records."[58] Two years later, a savvy and thoroughly professionalized Carson stated, "Radio made me."[59]

Richard A. Peterson has shown how the fledgling country music industry crafted its own image "as a rustic alternative to urban modernity." Record company executives, like university educated folklorists and the middle-class proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement, tended to be—or to see themselves as—urbane sophisticates, who viewed the rural southern music makers and their audiences as polar opposites of the executives' own presumed sophistication. In Peterson's words, "It was country to their city, the unchanging past to the rapidly changing present, the rear-guard to their avant-garde."[60] Hoping to sell records to this "rear-guard," the executives mined the south for capable

musicians who could record the familiar tunes already performed widely and informally among rural southerners. By the end of 1924, New York-based Okeh Records, to take just one example, had released approximately 40 tunes drawn from the long circulating corpus of rural material, all recorded by and marketed to white southerners. For marketing purposes, the record companies turned to depictions of stereotypical hillbilly mountaineers, coupled with the phrase "old time," believing that this would create a desired image of well worn, comfortable rusticity. In a pattern followed by other labels, Okeh devoted catalog space and advertising material specifically to "old time tunes" played "in the real old time way." By the end of the decade, the U.S. record industry as a whole had issued approximately 3,500 distinct titles in the self-defined old-time tune category. [61]

Once the record industry entered the world of rural folk song, the problem of copyright arose. In the course of the informal oral and aural transmission that pre-dated recording, performers altered lyrics, melodies and even titles, sometimes consciously, sometimes not. They would, at times, claim to have composed these variants, but such "authorship" was a loose concept. As Gene Wiggins notes, "Sometimes when they say 'wrote' they mean 'crystallized a personally meaningful version.'" Bill Malone reports, "In a sense, virtually every hillbilly musician was an 'arranger,' but few bothered to copyright their arrangements" until the late twenties, when the country music industry began to take shape in earnest. [62] By then, the prospect of making money collided with the reality of a vast number of recorded old- time tunes originating from within the same body of informally circulating material. The threat of copyright litigation became a significant concern. To avoid it, industry executives needed new songs. They were not, however,

willing to abandon the successful "old-time" marketing niche. To solve the problem posed by the apparent commercial exhaustion of already well-known material, they arrived at an ingenious, thoroughly business-like solution. They sought brand new tunes that sounded like the old-fashioned, traditional ones—"music that connected with the past and extended the tradition," which Peterson aptly calls the "simulation of tradition." If record buyers believed that they were, in fact, hearing old, traditional tunes, so much the better. Thus, the phrase "old-time" came to describe not just a temporal category but also an aesthetic one.[63]

As demonstrated by Fiddlin' John Carson's eager farewell to moonshining, it was hard to resist the lure of making money while simultaneously becoming a star of an emerging, almost magical, entertainment medium. Still, even as they benefited, some performers resented their commercial construction as old-time hillbilly musicians. Like the idea of the "folk," the "hillbilly" is an image as much derided as romanticized. In his seminal analysis of the birth of the hillbilly music industry, Archie Green traces the pejoratives connected with a word linked indelibly to uneducated, often impoverished, rural white Southerners. He begins with "poor white trash" and moves on to Fanny Kemble's description of antebellum Georgia pinelanders—"the most degraded race of human beings claiming an Anglo-Saxon origin that can be found on the face of the earth—filthy, lazy, ignorant, brutal, proud, penniless savages."[64] The fact that outsiders tended to profit from these slanders compounded the hurt.

Georgia fiddler Clayton McMichen was one musician who bitterly resented the characterization. McMichen began recording for Columbia Records in 1926 with The Skillet Lickers, talented players who, with titles such as "Hog Killing Day" and "Possum

Hunt on Stump House Mountain," cultivated an image as "a band of backwoods Georgia hillbillies." Possessed of catholic tastes and considerable skill, McMichen hoped to make his mark with sophisticated dance music that owed more to jazz than to the sounds of the early southern fiddle contests. In 1931 he formed a band filled with eclectic players who helped him explore the blend of country and jazz that today we associate indelibly with the Western Swing of Texan Bob Wills. McMichen struggled for years to gain acceptance as an innovator but his experiments never caught on, perhaps because he was unlucky enough to branch out just as the depression sent record sales tumbling. Time after time, the need to earn a living forced him to return to the old time sounds he characterized as "swamp opera."[65]

Through the great depression the hillbilly image, in conjunction with the singing cowboy popularized by Hollywood, remained the predominant signpost of country music authenticity. In 1942, when faux-hillbillies filled the stage of the Grand Ole Opry, by then the undisputed church of country music, Billboard declared, "Thar's gold in them there hillbilly and other American folk tunes."[66] Still, like McMichen, sometimes the folk refused to be "folk." Another among this rebellious group was Eddy Arnold, a hugely successful singer who reached his largest audience after he embraced a polished, heavily orchestrated "countrypolitan" sound. Born in 1922 and raised on a Tennessee farm, Arnold grew up surrounded by informal community music making. To quote biographer Michael Streissguth:

> [Arnold's Chester County, Tennessee home] hopped with music. Fiddlers, banjo players, and guitarists dotted the land, and Ed heard them at church, candy breakings, community picnics, and other local gatherings. . . The music that drifted across the fields was the Chester County adaptation of folk music and songs from Tin Pan

> Alley. Musicians learned the folk music from their fathers, preachers and school teachers and the Tin Pan Alley songs from sheet music or 78-rpm records.[67]

Young Ed, who learned his first guitar chords at age 7, absorbed it all. By 1943, just 21-years old and bursting with ambition, Arnold earned a coveted slot on the Opry's regular Saturday night radio broadcast, an accomplishment soon followed by a Victor recording contract. But within five years the Opry's hillbilly fixation embarrassed the onetime farm boy whose first big hit, "The Cattle Call," contained a yodel reminiscent of the great Jimmie Rodgers, country music's first superstar. A fan of Bing Crosby and desirous of his own modern, more sophisticated image, Arnold resigned from the show, displaying open disdain for stereotypes grounded in tales of feuding and homemade liquor. When challenged by an Opry staffer, who asked how he could leave the show that "made" him, Arnold replied with a contemptuous reference to an old-time band with a moonshine image that never rose above the Opry. "If it made me," he asked, "why hasn't it made the Fruit Jar Drinkers?"[68]

Developing at approximately the same time, folklore scholarship and the mass entertainment industry mined similar material. The hillbilly and the cowboy, popularized and exploited by the recording and film industries, mirrored the interests of those earliest folklorists, Sharp and Lomax. While folklorists altered texts to satisfy personal agendas, the music industry created new "folk" songs out of whole cloth to satisfy agendas borne of perceived consumer demand. This demand encompassed more than music. In response to a rapidly increasing number of local folklore societies, scholars and entrepreneurs joined forces through the first half of the twentieth century to produce and market countless popular collections of printed folklore, consisting not only of songs but also of

stories, riddles and games.[69] As mobility advanced and mass media's influence grew, it became increasingly difficult to separate supposedly pure products of oral tradition from new hybrids that traveled vast distances and changed with dizzying speed.

Robert Winslow Gordon was one entrepreneurial scholar who struggled to distinguish between so-called genuine folk expression and the more conscious creations of writers, entertainers and media executives. Born in 1888, Gordon entered Harvard in 1906, where his professors included some of the same men who influenced John A. Lomax. In a life that included service as founder and initial director of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, Gordon devoted decades to exploring the ongoing interaction between folk and mass culture. For roughly five years in the mid-1920s he wrote a regular column entitled "Old Songs That Men Have Sung" for the pulp magazine Adventure. Combining submissions from readers with his own extensive fieldwork, he sought to preserve and pass on a broad sampling of America's hidden songs, hoping to transcend boundaries of ethnicity, race, region, occupation and class.[70]

In a world that wove folk and mass culture together, Gordon sought a definition of folksong that made sense, admitting candidly that the question "What is folk-song?" was likely insoluble. It "cannot yet be answered fully," he wrote. "It never has been satisfactorily answered and perhaps never will be." Still, he tried, and he devoted considerable thought to the distinction between "author" songs, which reflect the mind of their creator alone, and folksongs, which he believed reflect the worldview of those communities that sing them. He dispensed quickly with the purely theoretical notion that folksongs involved no author at all, conceding that someone put together the basic framework that forms the core of any song. Folksongs, however, are those that transcend

the role and purpose of their initial creator. "Folk-song," he declared, "is not the product of an author. An author may have composed it, but it is not his; he is merely an incident, unimportant and soon forgotten . . ." Gordon's point was that folksongs are made, not born. The status of folksong is determined not by any circumstance of initial creation but by examining what happens to a song after its birth. Songs become folksongs after people incorporate them into their daily routines of work, play, worship and grief. We assess the character of a community, the folklorist believes, by examining the songs it chooses to import into daily life and the manner in which it uses, alters and discards the songs selected.[71]

Gordon appreciated how rapidly and pervasively mobility and media were altering the nature of the folk and their songs. "Everywhere I was told of the effect of the great war in bringing back to the mountain recesses a knowledge of the outside world, in arousing a desire to go out, to earn what seemed to be huge wages, to see the world. And with the emigrants, the old songs are coming out of the mountains and beginning to take root in the cities—whether to live or die no one knows."[72] In a 1932 report to the Library of Congress, he summarized some conclusions regarding the intermingling of folk and popular texts, a two-way process that, he now recognized, pre-dated organized folklore scholarship in the United States:

> Among such finds may be mentioned by way of illustration only (1) the discovery of a very close inter-relationship between genuine folk material and vaudeville songs in the period 1840-1890, (2) the finding of certain genuine folk texts otherwise unrecorded which had been preserved in comparatively pure form in vaudeville repertoire, (3) the certainty that much burlesque and pseudo-folk material, gradually developed by white minstrel troupes for stage use, eventually found its way back to the folk and became in turn the basis for further genuine folk compositions, (4) the discovery of the

> definite origins of certain folk tunes and of their gradual change and growth, resulting eventually in apparently new tunes, (5) important discoveries as to essential differences in rhythm and pitch between the true folk-song and conventional author songs which may result eventually in a much closer definition of what folk-song really is, (6) the recognition of the parts played by individual authors in the spread and development of folksong . . . [73]

As the thirties progressed, the New Deal's political emphasis on the depression-era plight of the common man fueled enormous popular interest in the hidden cultural treasures that Gordon exalted. In 1934 John A. Lomax and his son Alan published American Ballads and Folk Songs. They noted that American balladry had enjoyed extraordinary popularity since the publication of Cowboy Songs a quarter century earlier, evidenced by the "more than one hundred ballad books in the Library of Congress, issued since that year." The public also enjoyed a substantial number of "quasi-folk songs put out by radio singers and other minstrels." The new Lomax anthology included songs of the western plains and the southeastern mountains, as well as miners' songs and sea-shantys, the laments of chain-gang workers, songs describing life on the rails, blues and spirituals, children's tunes and those of "white desperadoes" and "negro bad men," still romanticized as a species of noble savage.[74]

The Lomaxes continued to straddle uncomfortably the line between folk and mass culture. Though they lamented the "spread of machine civilization," their book both reflected and added to the growing commercial market for folklore. In feeding that market, they continued John's practice of altering and combining texts, wanting to provide readers with singable songs as opposed to a collection of fragments or scattered verse. They realized that compilations such as theirs could hasten the day when everyone

in the country sang the same songs in the same manner, making it impossible to discern, through music, any unique community character. There was, they wrote, "an element of sadness in imprisoning a folk song in type. For the song at once becomes adult; it grows no more." Though they could bemoan one of revivalism's inherent contradictions, they could also be remarkably devoid of self-reflexivity. They hung on to folklore's bias for the old and the rural, as well as to some of the discipline's more unattractive paternalism. Instead of seeing jazz, for example, as a desirable display of African-American cultural power, they shunned it because of its fairly rapid commercial success. Castigating it as "the debased offspring of Negro song," they complained that its growing predominance made it harder to find "the old tunes." Demonstrating utter obliviousness to the need for improvement in the socio-economic conditions of African-Americans, they argued that "daily association with whites, and modern education prove disastrous to the Negroes' folk singing, destroying much of the quaint, innate beauty of his songs."[75]

By contrast, other depression-era political activists were quite conscious of the economic status of at least some members of the rural folk. It was during the 1930s that folksong took on an explicit and still lingering left-wing political coloration. Since so much of the folksong canon was both broadly recognizable and easy to perform, leftist activists, hoping to advance the cause of what they considered an oppressed proletariat, turned to traditional American tunes for use as an organizing tool. Often, they composed new, politicized lyrics for well-known traditional melodies. In the words of communist cultural critic Mike Gold, use of the old familiar tunes made "the revolution as easy and simple as 'Old Black Joe.'"[76] Hearkening back to the theoretical idea of collective composition, political workers viewed these songs as creations of "the people"

themselves, designed to reflect and foster community, thus positing them in opposition to the products of a presumably exploitative popular culture industry interested solely in its own profit. As Richard Reuss put it: "The [folk song] form was not strongly identified with bourgeois music institutions such as Tin Pan Alley or Broadway, but instead was a product of the American cultural experience associated with the rural lower classes."[77]

In November 1931 a committee of writers led by novelist Theodore Dreiser visited Kentucky to investigate conditions arising from a bitter strike, one that pitted mine owners against the communist-allied National Miner's Union. Dreiser's group held "hearings" designed to provide miners with an opportunity to publicize their difficulties. One particularly compelling witness was "Aunt" Molly Jackson, a Kentucky miner's wife, avocational singer and songwriter and self-identified labor spokesperson. Jackson's vivid testimony about misery in the coalfields, capped by an a capella performance of her own musical composition "Hungry Ragged Blues," captivated the committee, whose members saw in her an "embodiment of Appalachia," capable of generating "enormous interest,—not only in this particular strike, but in the oppression of workers all over the world." Soon, under the auspices of her activist sponsors, Jackson relocated to New York City where she told and sang of Appalachian hardship and oppression. [78]

Though mutually beneficial, the relationship between Jackson and her patrons was a complex one, marred by the potential for paternalism that existed whenever culture brokers made common cause with an idealized folk. Political activists and sympathetic folklorists brought Jackson and her songs to the attention of a wider world, thus assuring her an immortality that she would not otherwise have had. Eventually, though, she came to believe that many regarded her as more symbol than human being. Though she

welcomed attention, she wanted it on terms that accepted her humanity. She had a ribald sense of humor, enjoyed a drink and wanted fair payment for her singing, all of which seemed to disturb some of her patrons. She grew angry with Alan Lomax, whom she believed did not compensate her fairly for recordings he made on behalf of the Library of Congress. She resented bitterly the fact that, after her novelty had worn off and her political utility faded, few groups invited her to perform, finding her harsh voice less pleasing than that of more polished, professional singers. Notwithstanding such difficulties, the left continued to use folksong as a tool, providing the foundation for the later careers of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan. While such activism brought folk music to the attention of an entirely new audience, the specter of educated, urban, political workers organizing to the accompaniment of newly composed "folksongs" that condemned the capitalist system further muddied the question of what, if anything, was an "authentic" folksong.[79]

As the depression ended, popular fascination with folklore continued. In 1944, Benjamin A. Botkin published A Treasury Of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, And The Traditions Of A People. Over 900 pages long, this collection ranged far beyond song in documenting arcane pockets of American popular literature. Under quaint chapter titles such as "Tall Talk" and "From The Liar's Bench," the book presented tales of legendary true life figures such as the young Abe Lincoln and of mythical heroes and villains, such as John Henry, the famed "steel driving man," and "Stackalee," who sold his soul to the devil so he could "go round doin' things no other living man could do . . ." Other items ranged from the supposed origins of such terms as "Hoosier" and "sucker" to a list of oddly named California mining towns, to a collection of "knock-knock" jokes. Botkin, a

Ph.D. in English who succeeded Robert W. Gordon and John A. Lomax as head of the Library of Congress's Archive of Folk Song, drew his wildly varied material from countless disparate sources, including published books, the Congressional Record, local newspapers, and magazines, both pulp and high-brow.[80]

Botkin made little effort to situate any portion of his vast potpourri within particular indigenous communities. Nor did he track textual changes over time or place, or explore how any given group of people used the material in their daily lives. Instead, he merely provided readers with access to an enormous collection of colorful miscellany, allowing them to use it as they wished, generally for no purpose other than an evening's entertainment. In a swipe at academia, he characterized his book as an explicit corrective to the problem, which he perceived, that folklore "seems to have become the possession of the few who study it rather than of the many who make or use it."[81] Thus, rather than use folklore to illuminate the lives of communities, Botkin sketched the broad outlines of some presumed "national" folklore—a cluster of characters, genres and motifs that he believed Americans, for the most part, held in common "as an expression of the land, the people, and their experience." Some might find extraordinary arrogance here but Botkin understood the reductionist nature of his approach. He realized that his titular phrase, "American Folklore," did not necessarily encompass more localized examples of "folklore in America."[82] Botkin was a popularizer, selling to the masses.

This approach infuriated Richard Dorson, a 1943 recipient of a Harvard Ph.D. in American Civilization, who eventually became one of America's most influential and prolific folklorists. Committed passionately to the enhancement of folklore within the academy, Dorson detested the practices of Botkin and other popular anthologizers, whom

he considered devoid of scholarly standards. Writing in 1950, he characterized these nominal colleagues as "money-writers," not folklorists, and accused them of doing nothing more than "rummaging through old and new books and magazines, and pasting together large albums vended as American folklore." Taking dead aim at the more reductionist tendencies of treasuries such as Botkin's, Dorson argued that they "stretch the term folklore out of all meaning, and shrink the definition of American to old stock Anglo-Saxons," despite the truly polyglot nature of the U.S. In deriding this "exclusive nativism," which he claimed "does both social and cultural injustice," Dorson bemoaned the fact that "the marvelously rich lore of Europe and Asia thus planted on our shores, a folk heritage no other country can remotely equal, remains in shadow. More than that," he feared, "it is scorned and derided by the pressures of school and family, until the immigrants' children feel shame for their family culture, for their second tongue, for their own names."[83]

Botkin's methodology made him an easy target for Dorson's specific criticism. Drawing solely from published sources, Botkin did no fieldwork, which made him, in Dorson's view, "like the dude fisherman who buys his catch at the market." Branding the result "fakelore," a term that survives to energize revival debates to this day, Dorson argued, "Ultimately, to get the full-bodied lore, someone, somewhere along the line, must talk to the folk . . ." Only by doing so could one gradually discern that which is truly traditional and get some sense of the vibrant life within the lore. By ignoring laborious, long-term fieldwork, Botkin was able to ignore communities, which enabled him to imagine that there existed some overriding "American" folklore, an idea that Dorson claimed to disdain:

> Any intelligible analysis of American folklore must, I suggest, recognize one primary fact: that there is no such thing as the lore of the nation, or of regions, but only the lore of groups. These groups are ethnic and the United States absorbs the world; they are occupational, based in common trades and jobs and apprenticeships, that range from cowboys to college students; they are communal, knit by genealogy and local history. Each group owns an esoteric body of anecdote and custom and song, commonplace to its members but bizarre to the outsider. . . Everyone belongs to some folk group, or to more than one, you and I too, no matter how urban and sophisticated we consider ourselves. . . In the folk ideas of such groups we can perceive traditional values, *tabus* [sic], obsessions, humors, which bind its members into tight fraternities, and divide American society into many chambers. It is time we began exploring these chambers.[84]

Dorson's recognition of American pluralism and his appreciation for that which was unique within American microcultures is laudable. He did, however, possess his own reductionist tendencies. In 1957 he proposed a theoretical approach designed to illuminate that folklore which best illustrated the "American character" and the "American mind" amidst the multi-ethnic, multi-racial "tower of Babel" that was the United States. He called upon folklorists to engage in the systematic identification and analysis of lore as it arose in conjunction with specific episodes in the American national experience. Among the non-exclusive examples he offered as fertile soil for research were colonization, westward expansion, slavery and immigration.[85] This attempt to tie folklore studies to some grand national narrative, or overlapping narratives, never took hold, undoubtedly because of the tension between its search for some overarching—and perhaps mythical—"American" identity and Dorson's own recognition that folklore arose and thrived among highly indigenous, localized groups.

Though Botkin and Dorson shared the desire to tell some uniquely "American" story through lore, there remained a significant, underlying conflict between the approaches of the two men. Botkin presented all types of expressive marginalia equally, whether they were rooted deeply in local oral tradition or the literary creations of small town newspaper editors. Like John Lomax before him, he was part entertainer, combining and redacting texts in search of the best possible story. Dorson, on the other hand, was in mind and heart a cultural anthropologist who hoped to bring scholarly illumination to the expressive life of groups. Presaging the battles between "purists" and popularizers that raged during the folk music boom, Dorson took aim not only at Botkin, but also at Alan Lomax's folk music radio broadcasts and the commercial folksinging career of entertainer Burl Ives. "The cavernous maw of the mass media gobbled up endless chunks of folksiness, and a new rationale appeared for the folklorist: his mission is to polish up, overhaul, revamp and distribute folklore to the American people. This," Dorson wrote with evident contempt, "he can do through the writing of juvenile and treasury folk-books, singing and recording of folksongs, and staging of folk festivals."[86] Superficially much of this was a struggle over nomenclature. Dorson could ignore Botkin's literary endeavors and other "folksy" entertainment but for the fact that they dared carry the name "folklore." The misuse of that term, however, signaled the scholar's deeper concern—his belief that popularization simplified, trivialized and thus demeaned vast numbers of richly expressive people spread across the American landscape.

Despite their differences, Botkin and Dorson each recognized that by the mid-twentieth-century folklore, however defined, was bound inextricably to the products of the mass culture industry, by then reaching most corners of American society. Botkin saw

popular culture as one source of the "folklore of the present." Consider the vast difference between his attitude toward jazz in the 1940s and that expressed by the Lomaxes only a decade earlier:

> The [popular] is distinguished [from the folk] by its wider and more passing acceptance, the result of transmission through such 'timely' media as stage, press, radio, and films. Yet the so-called lively arts—jazz, vaudeville, burlesque, comic strips, animated cartoons, pulps—often have a folk basis or give rise to new folk creations, such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. Many of the innovations of popular lore are associated with new inventions: e.g., the Ford joke and the gremlins.[87]

Botkin was astute enough to realize that modernization—that bane of his disciplinary ancestors—was not destroying folklore but forcing a re-examination of the term. Not content to merely salvage survivals, he wrote that folklore "says not only 'Back where I come from,' but also, 'Where do I go from here?'" He went on:

> The industrial folk tales and songs in this book are evidence enough that machinery does not destroy folklore. Rather, in our rapid development from a rural and agricultural to an urban and industrial folk, we have become estranged from the folklore of the past, which we cannot help feeling a little self-conscious or antiquarian about, without being able to recognize or appreciate the folklore of the present.[88]

In offering his own theoretical perspective, Dorson disclaimed any desire "to tilt at the windmills of our culture to restore pure, unpolluted folklore. Rather, I suggest that the American folklorist consider the relationship between mass culture and folklore patterns." He proposed that folklorists study such phenomena as military and juvenile humor, the aggressive pitches of salespeople and the anecdotes passed on publicly by business and political leaders, suggesting that these current streams of expression might reveal "motifs of unsuspected antiquity, clothed in new dress to suit modern times."[89] Unlike Botkin,

however, he eschewed third-hand, mediated accounts that altered lore for the purpose of entertainment. Committed to rigorous scholarship, he insisted upon first-hand research.

Even as he proposed examining folklore within modern, mass-mediated culture, Dorson still spoke in terms of survivals. His use of the words "pure" and "unpolluted," along with his ongoing battle against "fakelore," conveyed a strong preference, both scholarly and emotional, for pre-industrial oral expression. In the latter half of the twentieth century, in decidedly non-linear fashion, scholars joined popularizers in confronting this preference head-on. Writing in 1963, Roger Abrahams attacked long-standing disciplinary precepts and the romantic gloss they fostered. "Too often," he argued, "the theoretical ideal of pure oral transmission" encouraged the folklorist to see himself as "dealing with sacrosanct matters, lore transmitted from the pure 'golden age' of the primitive past of Indo-European culture by word of mouth, and thus divorced from contemporary discourse, except as vestige." Abrahams urged analysis of lore in as full a cultural context as possible, the better to understand the competing forces that give communities, however defined, their identities. He grounded his call in the growing realization that folklore "is, in fact, a very live cultural phenomenon, subject to the same processes as other things cultural, and therefore available to the same type of analysis as other similar humanistic studies."[90]

Recognizing rapid urbanization in the U.S. and around the world, Alan Dundes argued, perhaps with tongue-in-cheek, that a focus on the contemporary was essential to the professional survival of folklorists:

> If modern folklorists accepted the nineteenth century definition of folk as illiterate, rural, backward peasants, then it might well be that the study of the lore of such folk might be strictly a salvage

> operation and that the discipline of folkloristics would in time follow the folk itself into oblivion. It is conceivable certainly that in time all the peasants of the world would become urbanized or sufficiently influenced by the urban centers as to lose their peasant qualities. The impact of the mass media: transistor radios, motion pictures, and the like has tended to encourage standardization of food, dress, language, etc.[91]

In articulating a contemporary place for his discipline, however, Dundes went on to argue that the "folk" survived despite the ubiquity of mass media. He echoed Dorson in recognizing a diverse "folk," one consisting of "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor." The nature of this linking factor was, Dundes believed, irrelevant. It could be occupation, language, religion or anything else, so long as the group had some traditions that it called its own. Given this "flexible definition," a folk group "could be as large as a nation or as small as a family." Moreover, folk groups could overlap, with individuals simultaneously belonging to different folk groups. With this approach Dundes suggested that folklorists could study the lore of such diverse folk groups as surfers, motorcyclists, computer programmers or, as Sheldon Posen realized eventually, folk revivalists.[92]

Though they agreed about the nature of folk groups, Dundes took issue with Dorson's vitriolic condemnation of "fakelore." Dundes understood the distinction between, on the one hand, traditional expression that survived informally within a community and, on the other, commercial creations that claimed the mantle of tradition. He also realized that for most groups it had been a very long time, centuries perhaps, since they had been insulated from either the intrusion of the marketplace or the conscious manipulation of their expressive traditions. Noting the manipulation that accompanied publication of the Scottish Ossian verse and the tales of the Brothers

Grimm, he pointed out that fakelore had "been inextricably and inseparably involved with the study of folklore from its very beginnings at the end of the eighteenth century."[93] Thus, Dundes suggested analysis instead of anger. He noted Dorson's fury at the plethora of Paul Bunyan tales, which Botkin and other writers presented as examples of American folklore. Dorson may have accurately argued that such tales were commercial creations, with little evidence demonstrating their existence in the oral tradition of any particular community. Yet to Dundes, Bunyan's pedigree was of less importance than the fact that so many Americans considered him a genuine folk hero and thus treated him like one. "The fact that dozens of Paul Bunyan statues adorn the American landscape . . . attests to the extent to which Paul Bunyan has entered the American consciousness." Rather than rail against fakelore, Dundes saw a more productive course in accepting "it as an integral element of culture just as folklore is." "Let us study it," he writes, "as folklorists."[94]

Expanding conceptions of the folk, recognition of the omnipresence of the mass media and an explicit rapprochement—by some—with fakelore, all represented a shift in the folklorist's perspective. Participating in a 1968 symposium on "The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition," Linda Degh commented on the post-World War II "sociocultural changes [that] made folklorists realize the necessity for broadening their field of study:"

> The modern, complex, pluralistic industrial society became the focus of attention. The increasing mobility of the population, the process of cultural hybridization and acculturation, and—more than anything else—a superior technological civilization forced the folklorist to face the facts of the present. The new trend . . . switched the emphasis from the past to the living folk traditions as reflections of modern society. These traditions were conceived of as the vehicles of expressions for modern groups of people, instead of a moth-eaten hoard of defunct survivals.[95]

The time was right for a reformulation of the field, one that theoretically distilled all of the socially driven changes in disciplinary scope. In the late sixties Dan Ben-Amos, a young scholar who had studied under Dorson, began formulating just such a restatement. In an essay that has proven to be one of the most influential and oft cited in disciplinary history, he called for a redefinition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups." After surveying the semantic swamp that had long plagued his field, Ben-Amos began with the premise that folklore, however defined, "is not thought of as existing without or apart from a structured group." Its very existence, he writes, "depends on its social context, which may be either a geographic, linguistic, ethnic, or occupational grouping." Historically, folklorists had directed their attention to material that circulated orally within such groupings. Even those who accepted the intermingling of lore with literary or electronic texts seemed wedded to the requirement of some degree of oral circulation over some period of time, however brief. The problem with this, as Ben-Amos saw it, is that it sought merely to "establish certain ideals about what folklore should be" without answering the underlying question, "What is it that circulates verbally and is transmitted through time within a distinct social entity?" To answer, as was typical, with a catalog of items, is to separate folklore from its function within the social grouping.[96]

Ben-Amos argued that folklore was not an aggregate of things but "a process—a communicative process, to be exact." In the contemporary world, where musicians perform "folksongs" on television before a diverse audience of millions, the singer is, at the moment of performance, divorced from any unique group function. It is legitimate, therefore, to ask if the song performed is a folksong as televised or merely a text that

sometimes functions as a folksong. If our underlying goal is to understand communities, then analysis of the time, mode and manner of communication is as essential to that understanding as is the particular text or practice communicated. Therefore, Ben-Amos argued, "the narrator, his story, and his audience are all related to each other as components of a single continuum, which is the communicative event." Folklore, he continued, "is the action that happens at that time." It is an artistic action that "involves creativity and esthetic response" and which "takes place in a situation in which people confront each other face to face and relate to each other directly." In other words, the same song may be a folksong in one context and an entertaining—and perhaps artistically rewarding—commercial commodity in another.[97]

In particularly provocative fashion Ben-Amos called upon folklorists to jettison the historical requirements of orality and tradition. The former merely fosters a frustrating and increasingly artificial search "for materials uncontaminated by print or broadcast"—a search that forces folklorists to "concentrate upon isolated forms and ignore the real social and literary interchange between cultures and artistic media and channels of communication." Tradition in Ben-Amos's view is nothing more than an analytical construct imposed by scholars, not necessarily a cultural fact. Where its role is meaningful, it deserves analysis as one factor among others. In many instances, however, those who use a particular expressive form may be wholly ignorant of its lineage. In others, the importance of a particular text or practice might arise from its newness, not its longevity. In still other cases, such as riddles, a form may disappear precisely because its heritage—and hence its punchline—is so well known that the form no longer serves a purpose. Ben-Amos viewed the requirement of tradition as a limiting factor, one which

inhibits the valuable study of "artistic forms that are part of the communicative process of small groups," a process that he considered culturally significant without regard to either textual longevity or mode of transmission.[98]

Given this challenge to basic tenets, some questioned the need to maintain any construct—such as the idea of a "folk"—that had not only outlived its usefulness but, notwithstanding attempts at reformulation, seemed linked indelibly with an imagined and still backward peasantry. In 1978 Charles Keil addressed this issue in a sardonic essay entitled "Who Needs 'the Folk'?" Keil saw the folk as nothing more than a mechanism through which relatively privileged scholars, entrepreneurs and consumers distanced themselves from those less advantaged, whom they studied, marketed and applauded. The folk served as "others" against whom the members of more privileged groups could establish a satisfactory self-definition as people catholic in taste and pluralist in world-view. Warning against the easy rejoinder that "electronic media are making folk of us all," he argued that the lore most often explored in practice belonged to a "folk" that remained oppressed, politically and economically. In the minds of far too many, Keil warned, "The folk are not the oppressed whose revolution is long overdue, but the Quaint-not-quite-like-us, the Pleasant peasants, the Almost-like-me-and-you, to be consumed at leisure." While the "ruling class" and "professing folklorists" might continue to need the folk, "the peoples of this planet, the communities of equals, the primitives, the peasants, and yes, the workers, need justice and joy, and friends who will join the struggle to achieve them." He urged adoption of an alternative terminology, one that did justice to the "oppositional thrust against 'class society' in general and 'modern industrial

state-capitalist civilization' in particular," which he considered a latent force in the discipline of folklore from its beginnings.[99]

Keil wrote at a time when the burgeoning "public folklore" movement was once again bringing the idea of the folk to the attention of a broad public, this time under the sponsorship of academically trained folklorists, not record companies or professional musicians. "Public folklore" is a disciplinary term of art. It describes a collaboration between folklorists and the members of a given community to present and interpret aspects of that community's heritage to the public-at-large and to the community itself. Typically these presentations involve concerts, films, demonstrations or some other type of public display. One encounters the work of public folklorists in varied settings, such as concert recitals of Native American music, public-radio programs exploring the roots of the blues and demonstrations of African-American dance on city streets. Such programs are subject to criticism on the grounds that they conflate complicated modes of behavior and foster stereotypical views of culture, which are infused with the romantic paternalism that has bedeviled folklore from its inception. At their best, however, public folklore presentations can promote pluralism and prompt valuable discussion about the relative merits of vernacular and mass-mediated art, heritage and assimilation, and stability and progress.

If there was a single driving force behind the public folklore movement, it was Archie Green, who believes passionately in pluralism and the value of vernacular art—art that is unique to communities, reflective of community identity and meaningful to community members. For roughly seven years, beginning in the late-1960s, Green lobbied Congress on behalf of the American Folklife Preservation Act. Finally enacted in 1976,

the Act established the American Folklife Center, charged with the duty to "preserve and present American folklife" through research, documentation, preservation and exhibition.[100] In pursuit of their cause, Green and other proponents advanced a view of a thoroughly diverse America, one that had no place for the homogenizing impact of the fabled melting pot. Testifying before Congress, actor and singer Theodore Bikel called the premise of the melting pot "an invidious and perhaps even an evil one. A melting pot is a nondescript mass without delineation and without definition. I don't believe that America was meant to be a melting pot." Bill Ivey, then Executive Director of the Country Music Foundation, argued that the nation's "greatest strength" lay in its diversity and he complained that the melting pot image had "obscured our vision of the various cultural treasures that lie within our grasp."[101]

Even as folklorists sought accommodation with the products of commercial media, they insisted that such media tended to suppress still extant local expression. Ivey argued that America was not "a homogenous mass of faceless pop-culture consumers, but . . . a vital matrix of ethnic, regional, and social identifications, involved in constant interaction." Echoing this theme, Alan Lomax condemned the media's limited presentations and maintained that America's cultural variety was "suppress[ed] by a one-cylinder, one standard communication system." Bikel derided the mass media's "equalization process." Sen. James Abourezk distinguished the nation's varied folk cultures from "mass culture, created by technology and lowered to a common denominator by the exigencies of the mass market." Joining this chorus, historian David Whisnant noted the media's tendency to mock that diversity which it did present, citing the "degrading" hillbilly stereotypes perpetuated by such television shows as "Hee-Haw" and

"The Beverly Hillbillies."[102] Lest some find elitism in this attack on popular culture, Green made it plain that it was his goal to highlight that which the media too often ignored. Avoiding scholarly jargon, he helped craft a statutory definition of folklife that made common cause with that most favored political constituency—the common people:

> [T]he term 'American folklife' means the traditional expressive culture shared within the various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, regional; expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, literature, art, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, handicraft; these expressions are mainly learned orally, by imitation, or in performance, and are generally maintained without benefit of formal instruction or institutional direction.[103]

Prompted by the struggle to create the American Folklife Center, the National Endowment for the Arts created its own Folk Arts Program to provide monetary grants to foster the cultural activities of vernacular artists. The almost simultaneous creation of these two programs represented an unprecedented level of federal support for the nation's vernacular heritage, which "legitimized the traditional arts in the eyes—and budgets—of agencies around the nation. . ." In 1978, six state folklife programs existed. Only ten years later, more than forty such programs, along with countless local agencies, dedicated themselves to the preservation and presentation of the folklife of the U.S.[104] As the practice of public folklore grew, increasing numbers of academically trained folklorists moved beyond the compilation, categorization and interpretation of traditional cultural expression and entered the worlds of agency management, concert promotion and documentary production. To the distress of Richard Dorson, academia and the great boom had seemingly joined hands. In keeping with Green's lobbying approach, much public folklore programming relies less on precise definition and theoretical nuance than

on an orientation that favors the marginal rather than the powerful, the informal rather than the institutional, and the everyday rather than the extraordinary.[105]

Still, the definition of folklore and related concepts remains muddled, leading to continued calls for clarification, re-definition or outright abandonment. In the 1990s folklorist Gene Bluestein added his voice to those arguing that the idea of the folk, as understood historically, fails to reflect the reality of the American experience. In its place, he urged embrace of the concept of "poplore," a word coined by Green in 1967. Green offered the term after attending the Berkeley Folk Festival, a musical event that joined traditionalists such as Doc Watson with popular revivalists such as Pete Seeger, and with then contemporary rock bands such as Red Crayola and Country Joe and the Fish. Poplore, Green maintained, encompasses "knowledge, actions, and manners which are conveyed by and accepted from such institutions as commercial entertainment and advertising." It comprises materials "which are disseminated by commercial entertainment and related media, but which function traditionally." An ardent believer in the existence and utility of small group expression, Green did not propose poplore as an alternative to "folklore" but as a supplemental rubric.[106]

Bluestein expands the term into a de facto substitute. Traversing ground examined decades earlier by Gordon, Botkin and Dorson, he bows briefly to the notion of folk culture but deems it largely irrelevant to "the characteristic American experience [that] involves a melding of folk and pop in the context of many diverse cultures." "The United States," he writes, "does not possess a body of anonymously created materials developed over long periods of time. What the nation has is poplore, an obvious mix of folk and pop elements that is associated with known artists, whose esthetic contributions often change

the inherited materials before our eyes."[107] Seeger, perhaps recognizing a theory that provides the imprimatur of scholarship to his own work, is impressed. The man who has ceased attempting to define “folksong” deems poplore a “very sensible new word.” “Two centuries ago,” he adds, “the word ‘folklore’ made sense, describing the traditional culture of the peasant class, 90% of the population. In these industrial-technology ridden times, it’s better to use a new word than try to make an old one fit.”[108]

Despite decades of conscious reformulation, old constructs die hard and both the academy and the popular revival continue to wrestle with the meaning and importance of tradition and authenticity. In the face of longstanding confusion and disagreement, and given the ongoing pitfalls of romantic paternalism, decontextualization, and racial and ethnic essentialism, it is hardly surprising that many present-day revivalists throw up their hands when confronted with the definitional fray. Understanding that their frequent involvement in concert production or record promotion places them firmly within the mass-mediated culture industry, recognizing the often marginal commercial status of the musical styles they enjoy, appreciating the substantial overlap among both cultures and musical genres, many simply hope to explore as wide an array of music as they can, as respectfully as they can. My own effort to find an appropriate terminology centers often on the concept of vernacularity. Green has explored the term "vernacular" at length, concluding that, like "folk," it is a "problematic tag." In a survey that encompasses not only music but literature, theatre, sculpture and the visual arts, he finds it applied most often to expression that is, in popular parlance, "native and home grown," as opposed to that which is created by self-described or readily apparent elites, be they artistic or commercial. Avoiding any strict requirement of traditionality or orality, vernacularity

suggests nonetheless a close connection between art and long-lived cultures, in ways that transitory popular artifacts cannot. Imperfect, but suitable to our task, it encompasses a wide range of music that exists outside the usual focus of mass media—music derived from the folk forms of diverse ethnicities, races, regions and occupations.[109]

The scope of vernacularity is well displayed by Nick Spitzer, an academically trained folklorist who produces and hosts a model of present-day revivalism on American Routes, a syndicated public radio program begun in 1998. The show "covers vast musical and cultural ground" that encompasses "blues and jazz, roots rock and soul, Cajun and country, zydeco and Tejano . . . and beyond."[110] In his effort to move past some of folklore's more outmoded constructs, Spitzer eschews the now tattered model of "cultural conservation" with its accompanying image of the paternalistic savior salvaging the dying. "Many public folklorists," he notes, in a comment that applies equally to more sophisticated revivalists, "are attempting neither repair nor recreation of an imagined pure form." Instead "our mode is collaborative in representing culture under new and current conditions." Playing with words, he proposes the substitute metaphor of "cultural conversation," suggesting a dialogue among the presenter, the artist or community presented and the audience, all engaged in the imperfect process of experiencing a living vernacular culture in a pluralistic America. It is this model that Rounder Records and the Folk Alliance have pursued and pursue today as they endeavor simultaneously to honor and to market the world's diverse musical traditions.[111]

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[1] Frank Page quoted in Teddy Allen, "All shook up: Elvis took local fans for an unforgettable (Hay)ride," Shreveport Times, 16 August 2002, 1A.

[2] "Folk Music, What's That? Sing Out! asks Pete Seeger," Sing Out!, Volume 2, Number 3, 1980, 2, 3.

[3] "Hip-Hop As Folk Culture," Program Book: 13th Annual International Folk Alliance Conference (Vancouver, BC 2001), 83. The program characterized early hip-hop as "the shared expression of a distinct community."

[4] Information regarding the World Wide Web location of all electronic discussion groups cited in this dissertation appears in the "Note on Citations," which follows the main text. FOLKDJ-L, a discussion group designed to serve the needs of folk music disc jockeys, periodically debates the nature of folk music, as does the fan-oriented rec.music.folk. BGRASS-L, an electronic community devoted to the string band style so prominent during the great boom, has hosted such a discussion, in addition to its routine debates on the meaning of "bluegrass," debates informed by many of the same values that govern the "what is folk" discussion.

[5] On Korson generally, see Angus Gillespie, Folklorist of the Coal Fields: George Korson's Life and Work (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980).

[6] BillK RB12, "Jewel, can she be defined as a folk or pop singer?" rec.music.folk, 7 June 1997 (accessed 28 February 2005). The full text reads, "SOMEBODY has to write the new folksongs. I think some of her songs, those dealing with social issues, qualify." (Emphasis in original.)

[7] Mark D. Moss, "The First Words," Sing Out!, August/September/October 1994, 2.

[8] Mark Moss, interview by author.

[9] Yarrow, Andrew L., "Resurgent Sing-Alongs Mix Banjos With Environmentalism," New York Times, 13 October 1992, B4; Don McLeese, "Don't let the 'folk' fool you; Bash is fun," Austin American-Statesman, 23 July 1995, B1; Amy Phillips, "Folk the Pain Away," Village Voice, 24 January 2003, online edition at <http://www.villagevoice.com/music/0305,phillips,41454,22.html> (accessed 28 February 2005); Jon Pareles, "Madonna's Real Art: Getting Attention," New York Times, national ed., 18 April 2003, p. E1; Tom Lanham, "Rhapsody In Blue," Pulse, February 2001, 32.

[10] Daniel Gewertz, "Clueless: Mainstream Media Gets Folk Wrong, Over and Over," Boston Herald, 20 December 2002, online edition at <http://www.bostonherald.com/entertainment/music/folk12202002.htm> (accessed 23 December 2002).

[11] Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, 1949 ed., s.v. "Folklore."

[12] Jan Harold Brunvand, "New Directions For The Study of American Folklore," reprinted in Jan Harold Brunvand, ed., Readings in American Folklore (New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1979), 416, 417. (Published originally in the journal Folklore, 1971.)

[13] Jan Harold Brunvand, ed., American Folklore: An Encyclopedia (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), s.v. "Folklore," by Jan Harold Brunvand.

[14] Ilana Harlow, "Introduction," Journal of American Folklore 111(1998): 231.

[15] Roger Abrahams, "The Public, the Folklorist, and the Public Folklorist," in Public Folklore, eds. Robert Baron and Nicholas Spitzer, 17, 19 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

[16] Ian McKay, The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 3.

[17] Jackson Lears, "Packaging the Folk: Tradition and Amnesia in American Advertising, 1880-1940," in Folk Roots, New Roots: Folklore in American Life, eds. Jane S. Becker and Barbara Franco, 103 (Lexington, MA: Museum of our National Heritage, 1988).

[18] Regina Bendix, In Search Of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 21. Bendix asked these questions with respect to the construct of "authenticity."

[19] Gene Bluestein, Poplore: Folk And Pop In American Culture (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 101.

[20] For disciplinary histories, see Simon J. Bronner, American Folklore Studies: An Intellectual History (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986) and Rosemary Levy Zumwalt, American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[21] William Thoms, "Folklore," in The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes, 4-6 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965) (Thoms published originally in 1846). I draw the details of Thoms' life and work from Duncan Emrich, "'Folklore': William John Thoms," California Folklore Quarterly 5 (1946): 355-374.

[22] Quoted in Emrich, "Folklore," 360.

[23] John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review 17 (July 1845): 5-10.

[24] "On The Field And Work Of A Journal Of American Folklore," Journal of American Folklore 1 (1888): 3-7.

[25] Susan Ritchie, "Ventriloquist Folklore: Who Speaks for Representation," Western Folklore 52 (1993): 365-378 (criticizing, at page 367, the folklorist's implicit assumption that "it is really possible to give the folk their own voice within the pages of our own articles, books and film" and arguing, at 377, "for political privilege, but not agency").

[26] "On The Field And Work," 5.

[27] Archie Green, Only a Miner: Studies in Recorded Coal-Mining Songs (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 4.

[28] Dillon Bustin, "New England Prologue," in Becker and Franco, 3; Henry David Thoreau, Walden in Walden and Other Writings, Joseph Wood Krutch, ed., Bantam Classic Edition (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1981), 124-125, 173-175 (first Walden publication, 1854); on "folklife" generally, see Don Yoder, American Folklife (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976).

[29] Richard M. Dorson, Folklore and Fakelore: Essays Toward a Discipline of Folk Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 33-34; Barre Toelken, The Dynamics of Folklore (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), 4.

[30] "Notes and Queries," Journal of American Folklore 1 (1888): 80.

[31] Jane S. Becker, Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 19.

[32] Edward Tylor writing in 1871, quoted in Simon J. Bronner, Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1998), 16.

[33] Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, s.v. "Folklore."

[34] Kay L. Cothran, "Participation in Tradition," in Brunvand, Readings in American Folklore, 444, 445.

[35] Roger D. Abrahams, "Folklore in Culture: Notes Toward an Analytic Method," reprinted in Brunvand, Readings in American Folklore, 390, 393.

[36] William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 14.

[37] Green, Only A Miner, 5.

[38] Henry Glassie, "Tradition," Journal of American Folklore 108 (1995), 395.

[39] On authenticity generally, see Bendix, In Search Of Authenticity. For discussions of the concept in the areas of country music and the blues, respectively, see Joli Jensen, The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music (Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1998) and David Grazian, Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[40] Bendix, In Search Of Authenticity, 6, 68-76.

[41] T. J. Jackson Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920 (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 10, 60-96 passim.

[42] Ibid., 69-70.

[43] Benjamin Filene, Romancing The Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 12, 13, 15. My discussion of Child draws heavily from Filene, who situates the Harvard professor as one of several influential "middlemen" whose work helped create a usable repository of American musical memories.

[44] Scott Alarik, "Child's Garden of Verses: The Life Work of Francis James Child," Sing Out!, Winter 2003, 64.

[45] Filene, Romancing The Folk, 14-15.

[46] "Sybil With Guitar," Time, 23 November 1962, 54**.**

[47] Alan Dundes, Folklore Matters (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 41-45.

[48] Filene, Romancing The Folk, 23

[49]Ibid.

[50] Nolan Porterfield, Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax, 1867-1948 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 114, 120.

[51] John A. Lomax, comp., Cowboy Songs And Other Frontier Ballads (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), "Collector's Note," passim (unpaginated).

[52] Ibid.

[53] Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 153-155.

[54] Lomax, Cowboy Songs, "Collector's Note."

[55] Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 155 and, with respect to the original publication of "Home on the Range," 528, n. 66.

[56] Bill C. Malone, Country Music, U.S.A., rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 38.

[57] Richard A. Peterson, Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 14-15.

[58] Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," reprinted in Archie Green, Torching The Fink Books and Other Essays on Vernacular Culture, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 17 (article first published in 1965).

[59] Peterson, Creating Country Music, 22.

[60] Ibid., 55, 57.

[61] Green, "Hillbilly," 19; Peterson, Creating Country, 35. Green and Peterson each document the creation of the hillbilly's visual image. Throughout the literature, the phrase "old time" is sometimes hyphenated and sometimes not. Some writers use the phrase "old timey," with or without a hyphen. Except when quoting others, I use the hyphenated phrase "old-time," following the approach of the Old-Time Herald, the contemporary magazine devoted to the genre.

[62] Wiggins is quoted in Peterson, Creating Country, 34. Malone, Country Music, 45. My discussion of the commercialization of rural southern music draws heavily from Malone at 1-75.

[63] Peterson, Creating Country, 35.

[64] Green, "Hillbilly," 12.

[65] Charles Wolfe, The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling (Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press, 1997), 87, 92-93. On the aesthetic and commercial aspirations of hillbilly performers generally, see Malone, Country Music, 54, 121-122.

[66] "Thar's Gold In Them There Hillbilly And Other American Folk Tunes," Billboard, 26 September 1942, 86.

[67] Michael Streissguth, Eddy Arnold: Pioneer Of The Nashville Sound (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 12.

[68] Streissguth, Eddy Arnold, 98.

[69] For a thorough survey of published folksong collections in the first half of the twentieth century, Debora Kodish, Good Friends and Bad Enemies: Robert Winslow Gordon and the Study of American Folksong (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 1-12.

[70] Ibid. I draw my survey of Gordon from Kodish's biography.

[71] R. W. Gordon, "The Folk Songs Of America: A Hunt On Hidden Trails," New York Times Magazine, 2 January 1927, 3, 23.

[72] R. W. Gordon, "Among The Hills Our Folk Songs Thrive," New York Times Magazine, 9 January 1927, 7.

[73] Gordon quoted in Kodish, Good Friends, 190**.**

[74] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, comp., American Ballads and Folk Songs (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), xxv-xxvi.

[75] Ibid., xxvi, xxx, xxxi, xxxv.

[76] Robbie Lieberman, My Song Is My Weapon: People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 35.

[77] Richard A. Reuss, "American Folksong and Left-Wing Politics: 1935-56," Journal of the Folklore Institute 12 (1975): 94-95.

[78] Shelly Romalis, Pistol Packin' Mama: Aunt Molly Jackson And The Politics of Folksong (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 39-42.

[79] I draw details of Jackson's career from throughout Romalis, Pistol Packin' Mama.

[80] B.A. Botkin, ed., A Treasury Of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions Of The People (New York: Crown Publishers, 1944), Abe Lincoln: 258-261, John Henry: 230-240, Stackalee: 122, hoosier: 328, sucker: 329, mining towns: 323-324; knock-knock jokes: 474-475.

[81] Ibid., xxi.

[82] Ibid., xxii-xxiv.

[83] Richard M. Dorson, "Folklore And Fake Lore," American Mercury, March 1950, 335, 338-340.

[84] Ibid., 338-340, 342-343.

[85] Richard M. Dorson, "A Theory for American Folklore," in Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore and the Historian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 15-48 (chapter published originally in 1959).

[86] Dorson, American Folklore and the Historian, 26-27.

[87] Botkin, A Treasury, xxiii. By 1938, Alan Lomax's own attitude toward jazz had begun to shift to one of greater acceptance. That year he recorded a series of interviews and musical performances with Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton, the self-proclaimed "inventor" of jazz. For an audio recording of musical selections from these sessions, see Jelly Roll Morton, The Library of Congress Recordings, Volumes 1-4, Rounder Records 1091-1094.

[88] Botkin xxii-xxiv

[89] Dorson, American Folklore and the Historian 45-47

[90] Abrahams, "Folklore In Culture," 390, 392.

[91] Alan Dundes, Essays In Folkloristics (Folklore Institute, 1978), 6.

[92] Ibid., 7-9 (emphasis in original).

[93] Alan Dundes, Folklore Matters, 41-44.

[94] Ibid., 53.

[95] "Prepared Comments by Linda Degh," in The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition, eds. Americo Paredes and Ellen J. Stekert, 53-54 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), following and responding to Richard M. Dorson, "Is There A Folk In The City?" at 21-52.

[96] Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," in Toward New Perspectives in Folklore, eds. Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman, 3-15 passim (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972).

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., 13-14.

[99] Charles Keil, "Who Needs 'The Folk'?" Journal of the Folklore Institute 15 (1978): 263-265. See also Richard M. Dorson, "We All Need The Folk," Ibid. at 267 and Charles Keil, "The Concept of 'the Folk'," Journal of the Folklore Institute 16 (1979): 209-210.

[100] Ormond H. Loomis, Cultural Conservation: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1978), 106.

[101] Sandra Gross Bressler, Culture and Politics: A Legislative Chronicle of the American Folklife Preservation Act (Ph.D. Dissertation, Dept. of Folklore and Folklife, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 57, 93.

[102] Ibid., Ivey: 93, Lomax: 52, Bikel: 57, Abourezk: 117, Whisnant: 177.

[103] Ibid., 213-214.

[104] Burt Feintuch, "Introduction: Folklorists and the Public Sector," in The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists and the Public Sector, ed. Burt Feintuch, 3 (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

[105] On Dorson's attitude toward the American Folklife Preservation Act, see Bressler, Culture and Politics, 61-62; Elliott Oring, "On the Concepts of Folklore," in Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction, ed. Elliot Oring, 17-18 (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1986).

[106] Green, Only A Miner, 3, 14; Bluestein, Poplore, 1-11 passim.

[107] Bluestein, Poplore, 101-102.

[108] Seeger's remarks appear on the back cover blurb to the initial paperback edition of Bluestein, Poplore.

[109] Archie Green, "Vernacular Music: A Naming Compass," Musical Quarterly 77 (1993): 35, 36, 43.

[110] American Routes, World Wide Web homepage at <http://www.americanroutes.com/> (accessed 2 March 2005).

[111] Nicholas R. Spitzer, "Cultural Conversation: Metaphors and Methods in Public Folklore," in Baron and Spitzer, Public Folklore, 77, 97-99.

3

PINSTRIPED SHIRTS AND THIRSTY BOOTS
Struggle Within The Great Folk Boom

Throughout the early-twentieth century, while millions of consumers enjoyed mass merchandised folklore, cultural partisans battled over the commodification of traditional art**.** In the 1950s, when entrepreneurs began blurring the boundary between folk and commercial music to a degree previously unimagined, these clashes grew increasingly common. For the first time it became possible to become both famous and extremely wealthy by appealing explicitly to a broad-based consumer appetite for folk music. Sincere preservationists, commercially driven manipulators and the many who lay in between recognized the power of such nebulous constructs as "the folk," "tradition" and "authenticity," through which songs, performers and events could be brought within or excluded from the profitable machinery of the revival. The stench of commerce gone wild in an arena that many still considered sacred ground fueled the long-running debate, which itself became part of popular discourse. Though sometimes at odds with one another, those seeking to preserve traditional heritage and those using folk music to advance their political aims found common ground in opposition to the worst excesses of merchandisers. For the lovers of heritage, anger flowed from the belief that popularizers severed lore from its cultural moorings, diminishing its meaning. The political activists, committed to the idea of the folk as a mainstay of their leftist ideology, grew furious at the specter of capitalist interests co-opting their ideals for the purpose of profit. Today, most revivalists have not only made a pragmatic peace with the marketplace but have embraced it. They view the commercial world less as an unregenerate evil and more as a

necessary, even desirable, tool for the transmission of diverse artistry. But memories of the commercial overkill of the sixties survive to influence contemporary discussion and practice. To understand fully the still existing tensions, one needs to examine the environment within which an earlier generation of revivalists confronted the marketplace.

In the preceding chapter I discussed the conflict between popularizers and those who sought to understand traditional expression within its cultural context. I begin this chapter by illuminating the leftist ideologues who saw in folk music the opportunity to forge a connection with an idealized common people. These romantic activists trace their immediate roots to the "mini-folk revival" of the generation preceding the boom, a phenomenon that focused less on the commercialization of folk music than on its political utility. By the early 1940s the impulse that brought Molly Jackson to New York had blossomed into a full-fledged political and cultural movement, one that merged "music with working class consciousness and progressive intellectual values."[1] Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, patron saints of the later boom, were prominent in this effort from its earliest days. Born in 1912 in Okemah, Oklahoma, Guthrie began singing and playing guitar while still a young boy, learning tunes from family members and the records of early country music stars such as Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family. In 1937 he joined the dust bowl migration to California and within a few months had his own radio show, on which he told tales and sang old ballads, hymns and hillbilly songs. During the next two years, Guthrie traveled through California's migrant camps, where he found fellow Oklahomans living in deplorable conditions. What he saw contributed to a rising political consciousness, rooted initially in a largely non-ideological concern for the plight of the common man. He began to express this concern in his own lyrics, often set to the

old tunes with which he was familiar. When he began to sing those songs on the radio, Guthrie came to the attention of the Communist Party, which saw in him "the living incarnation of social issues they had grappled with. . ." For the rest of his working life Guthrie devoted much of his time to singing and writing on behalf of the left. His medium was American folksong.[2]

Pete Seeger was born in 1919, the son of a left-leaning musicologist who was a friend of John and Alan Lomax. He left Harvard shy of a degree, briefly considered a career in journalism, then decided to try his hand as a professional musician. In early 1940 the younger Lomax was helping to organize a “Grapes of Wrath” benefit for California migrant workers, held on March 3 in New York City. Guthrie, whom the left viewed as the embodiment of migrant hardship, traveled from California to appear. Lomax offered Seeger, then making his first tentative stabs at public performance, a spot on the bill. Years later, two things about that night stood out in Seeger’s mind—his own embarrassingly amateurish performance and the stunning impact of Woody Guthrie. Recalling that evening, Lomax marveled at the tremendous impact it had on American culture: "Go back to that night when Pete first met Woody Guthrie. You can date the renaissance of American folk song from that night. Pete knew it was his kind of music, and he began working to make it everybody’s kind of music. . . It was a pure genuine fervor, the kind that saves souls."[3]

Adhering to a highly romantic notion of an idealized common man as representative of a life uncorrupted by the forces of capitalism, Guthrie and Seeger became the nucleus of an urban, largely educated folksong movement that entertained and encouraged labor and other left-wing groups. Along with Lee Hays, Millard Lampell

and a shifting cast of other performers, they began working together as The Almanac Singers, performing union and peace songs nationwide during an 18-month period just before and after America's entry into the Second World War. Using newly composed lyrics set to traditional melodies, they sang at meetings and along picket lines to activist audiences who were generally already in sympathy with the singers' point of view. In explaining their approach, Hays described folk singing as "a form of battle and a frontal movement to preserve our own people's culture." Following the war, Seeger, Guthrie and others formed People's Songs, Inc. and its successor, People's Artists, activist groups that provided songs and singers to a wide range of progressive organizations, including the 1948 presidential campaign of Henry A. Wallace. Casting themselves in opposition to the capitalist mass culture industry, Seeger declared that their goal was to "circumvent . . . the music monopoly of Broadway and Hollywood."[4] Though these organizations soon foundered, their principals went on to start Sing Out! magazine in 1950, the revival chronicle that survives to this day.

Seeger and Hays soon learned that the line dividing pop music from their own brand of mediated, agenda-driven folk music was not necessarily clear. As the 1940's ended, they, along with friends Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman, began singing together as The Weavers. Throughout 1949 the group sang at house parties, left-wing fundraisers and those commercial engagements it could obtain. One such engagement led to an unexpected contract with Decca Records and in 1950, in a sudden, surprising precursor to the commercial folk boom that would begin in earnest eight years later, the group found itself at the top of the pop charts, singing folk songs to the accompaniment of a large orchestra. Though their hits—"Goodnight, Irene," "Tzena, Tzena," "On Top Of

Old Smoky," "When The Saints Go Marching In"—were utterly devoid of explicit political content, the performers' personal leanings and the political rationale behind their folk repertoire were well known to sympathizers. Thus The Weavers' music, according to Seeger biographer David Dunaway, "operated on two levels: commercial pop songs, accessible to all listeners; and a symbolic, encoded music (available only at live concerts) that reminded the left of its existence: calypso, peace, topical songs."[5] Eventually, the lure of continued commercial success presented wrenching conflict. Decca, uninterested in the quartet's political agenda and desirous of selling as many records as possible, pressured the group to avoid appearances before political organizations and to eliminate all topical references from its live performances.

Seeger in particular felt the strain but the anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950's soon resolved any conflicts he had regarding success. The Weavers fell victim to the blacklist and in early 1952 they disbanded. Despite having sold over four million singles they could not find a commercial venue that would book them. Compelled by subpoena, Seeger appeared before the infamous House Un-American Activities Committee in August 1955. Many urged him to refuse to answer questions, pursuant to the Fifth Amendment's protection against self-incrimination. Seeger refused to give the committee the satisfaction of labeling himself a criminal and was determined to challenge any sweeping inquiry into personal political thought. Fully aware of the legal ramifications, he declined to cite the Fifth Amendment. Instead, he informed his interrogators that they simply had no right to question him about his beliefs or associations, a position that his lawyers later grounded in the first amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech. Eventually convicted of contempt of Congress, Seeger received a sentence of one year in

federal prison. In May 1962, seven years after his congressional appearance, an appellate court overturned that conviction on technical grounds.[6]

The red scare sparked poisonous infighting within the folk music community, prompting a schism far more venomous than that between purists and popularizers. Some, like Seeger, openly defied the Communist-hunters, while others—whether through avarice or legitimate fear—sought accommodation. In October 1951 Oscar Brand, recording artist and host of New York radio's popular "Folk Song Festival," condemned the Communist Party's use of folk music "for their own propaganda purposes" and argued "the presentation of traditional material is impossible where the Communists wield their influential censorship." Charging that Brand cared only about saving his career, Sing Out! attacked him bitterly in an editorial headlined "Folk-Singer Oscar Brand Joins Witch-Hunt Hysteria."[7] Brand insists that he wanted nothing more than the opportunity to play whatever music he wished. Forty years after the controversy, he maintained steadfastly that he had been "blacklisted by both the left and the right."[8] In 1952 Burl Ives, the nation's then most commercially successful folksong popularizer, testified before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and identified several colleagues as left-wing sympathizers. One of them, Richard Dyer-Bennet, saw his performing career damaged seriously, and bitterness over the incident lingered for years. Seeger, writing in 1957, attacked Ives as a "common stool- pigeon [who testified] to preserve his lucrative contracts; and that makes his action all the more despicable."[9]

By the time of the blacklist Seeger was a married father who needed to earn a living. The sharp decline in commercial opportunities forced him to travel incessantly in search of work. Alone, he traversed the country playing before anyone who would have

him, be they political groups, schoolchildren or summer campers. As singer Don McLean explained, "Pete went underground. He started doing fifty-dollar bookings, then twenty-five dollar dates at schoolhouses, auditoriums, and eventually college campuses. He definitely pioneered what we know today as the college circuit . . . He persevered and went out like Kilroy, sowing seeds at a grass-roots level for many, many years."[10] Forced to work alone with only his banjo for accompaniment, Seeger focused on homespun renditions of the traditional folk tunes that he loved. The economic need to perform virtually anywhere meant that his audiences were not always sympathetic to an explicit political message. Thus to an increasing degree, he spread folk music simply because he loved it; its politics were articulated, if at all, only within his heart.

Even as the blacklist's impact eased, Seeger remained a lightning rod for controversy. A 1956 appearance at New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music drew vehement protest, prompting a grandstanding Brooklyn borough president to claim, "nearly everyone agrees with me when I say that there is no room—on the stage or even in the wings—for left-wingers . . ."[11] In 1958, claiming a risk of damage to the building, the Detroit Arts Commission refused to allow him to sing at a public auditorium on the grounds that applicable regulations prohibited "programs of political or controversial nature." After satisfying the court that Seeger intended to do nothing but sing, the Detroit Labor Forum obtained a judicial order that allowed the show to proceed.[12] Through these ludicrous overreactions, Seeger's opponents helped him solidify a legacy as a heroic outsider fighting the forces of government repression. That role, however, did not have automatic appeal to the working people he hoped to reach, many of whom proved stubbornly conservative politically and enamored of the mass culture that Seeger

disdained. Instead of finding common ground with all of the world's workers, Seeger became an icon to leftist activists and ultimately to folk revivalists of all stripes, who admired his fervent love of tradition and his unabashed belief in the value of communal song.

Despite internal schisms and external attacks the commercial folk scene managed consistent growth through the 1950s, appealing to many who were unconcerned with or wholly ignorant of the cultural and political battles that consumed partisans. Amidst a steady stream of activity, a few benchmarks illustrate the range of approaches. In 1949 the already established Burl Ives released the first volume of A Collection of Ballads and Folk Songs on Decca Records, which eventually grew to a three-album set. The Weavers' success followed, as did that of The Tarriers, an inter-racial vocal trio that had a 1956 hit with "Banana Boat Song," a middle-of the road adaptation of a Caribbean folk melody. The tune, better known as "Day-O," went to number 5 on the pop charts a few months later, in a rendition by Harry Belafonte that sparked a brief "calypso" fervor. In mid-decade, The Gateway Singers also attained some commercial success. Formed in California at the start of the decade by leftist activists, the quartet eventually toned down its politics and joined Decca's roster of folk-oriented vocal groups, playing nightclubs across the country to considerable acclaim. Gateway founder Lou Gottlieb went on to form The Limeliters, one of the more successful of the pop-folk groups that emerged during the boom.[13]

Specialty record labels released more adventurous fare. Among the more eclectic was New York's Folkways Records, founded in the late 1940s by Moses Asch, who had begun producing records in 1939. The Folkways catalog is a wildly diverse mix,

encompassing, among many other things, Appalachian ballads, Mississippi delta blues, African war drums, Afghani teahouse music and even train whistle sounds. Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld has observed that if one "were to name a hundred great records of the world's music, 40 or 50 would be Asch's." Though Asch recorded Guthrie, Seeger and others who shared his leftist views, the bulk of his collection is not overtly political. For Asch politics lay in recording what journalist Tony Scherman calls "the voice of Man." It lay in giving voice to those whom Decca and other major labels would never record. It lay in presenting an array of racial and ethnic music so diverse and so qualitative that it just possibly might advance the cause of human understanding.[14] Asch encouraged a young generation of amateur folklorists, who began to locate active vernacular performers and bring them to the attention of a new audience, one that delighted in cultural enlightenment. In 1956, to cite just one influential project, he gave Mike Seeger, Pete's half-brother, a one-hundred-dollar stipend to make field recordings of southern banjo players. Folkways released the collection under the title American Banjo Scruggs Style. It was the first bluegrass-oriented recording targeted primarily at a northern urban audience and the first album of southern banjo music ever issued, as opposed to the singles targeted previously at rural markets.[15]

One Folkways project in particular had a tremendous impact on the revival. In 1952 the label released its six-record, heavily annotated Anthology of American Folk Music. Greenwich Village habitué Harry Smith compiled this 84-song release from his rare collection of 78-rpm blues and hillbilly records. Like all Folkways releases, its commercial impact was non-existent but it gradually struck a chord with a growing

number of folk fans. Performer Dave Van Ronk, the unofficial "mayor" of the Village folk community from the late fifties until his death in 2001, described its influence:

> At a time when all these old records from the 1920's and 30's were absolutely impossible to find . . . all of a sudden comes this collection. It was just an incredible compendium of American traditional music performed in the traditional style, which was very important for my generation because . . . without that we simply could not have existed, because there was no way for us to get hold of that material.
>
> And it was important to us to know that it was there . . . and to give us some sense of what traditional music in the United States was all about, and not just from second and third-hand interpreters. It was our Bible and it was our classical education, and we all knew every song on it. I still probably do.[16]

Van Ronk's reverential testament cuts to the heart of revivalism's—and folklore's—theoretical muddle. Because the selections on the Anthology date from the dawn of commercial recording, they consist necessarily of many tunes and lyric fragments that circulated orally. Still, the recordings themselves have a thoroughly commercial heritage, consisting of music industry product designed specifically to appeal to niche markets of an earlier era—in this case, rural purchasers, both black and white, who liked tunes with a homespun sound. Many of the featured performers—such as bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson and country music's legendary Carter Family—were consummate professionals hoping that their recordings would bring recognition and money. Critic Greil Marcus argues that this material attracted Smith, at least in part, precisely because it was commercial in nature. Smith, he writes, "ignored all field recordings, Library of Congress recordings, anything validated only by scholarship or

carrying the must of the museum." He wanted music "to which people really had responded: records put on sale that at least somebody thought were worth paying for."[17]

For Van Ronk to suggest that Smith's selections were the work of some mythical first generation that performed in "the traditional style"—as if only one such style existed—is to adopt a rigid view of authenticity that consigns folklore to the past, denies the idea of tradition as a process and ignores the professional context of the original recordings. In fairness to Van Ronk, who was well versed in such issues, his off-the-cuff remark hardly reflects the totality of his understanding. As a craftsman who believed in musical innovation while respecting earlier forms, and as an iconoclast who delighted in puncturing all sacred cows, he tended to view the argumentative extremes as equally ridiculous.[18] Still, his remark reflects the common, instinctive and long-standing revivalist tendency to view folklore as the frozen-in-place product of a long ago American south. Smith's famed Anthology itself suggests the same bias. Anchored firmly in the southland, it contains no hint of the varied musical styles indigenous to the many immigrant groups that now claimed the mantle of "American," groups that Smith necessarily encountered whenever he walked along his Manhattan streets.

College student Jac Holzman brought Asch's more eclectic aesthetic to Elektra Records, the label he started in 1952 and built into a revival institution. After an unprofitable debut with an album of avant-garde piano and vocal music, Holzman quickly reevaluated his focus. Folksongs were easier and less expensive to record and offered the chance to "create a label with a stylistic niche." He began with the initial album release of a woman who became a revival stalwart, Jean Ritchie Singing the Traditional Songs of Her Kentucky Mountain Family. Within a few years, his catholic

tastes produced LPs featuring the folksongs of Haiti, Turkey, Spain, Mexico, Israel and many other nations. While Folkways marketed heavily to libraries and schools, Holzman targeted a popular audience. His diverse offerings generally featured professional interpreters such as Theodore Bikel, the actor and singer, Cynthia Gooding, a regular on the Manhattan cabaret circuit, and Oscar Brand, the New York radio host and a polished performer. In an early label profile, critic Nat Hentoff wrote that Elektra was "known for its catalogue of 'entertainment' folk music—recordings that often do appeal to the specialist but basically are aimed at that wider market of listeners who like their folk songs programmed, performed and packaged so that they can enjoy the music immediately."[19]

Notwithstanding its broad range Elektra did not neglect that revival staple, the music of the rural American south. It followed Ritchie's album with American Folk Songs and Ballads, featuring Frank Warner, an avocational folksong collector and performer. Among the album's tunes was "Tom Dooley," a North Carolina murder ballad that served as the de facto kickoff to the great boom when recorded several years later by The Kingston Trio in a hugely successful albeit controversial rendition. The song's protagonist, Tom Dula, murdered his lover in 1868 and the tune commemorating his misdeed and subsequent hanging entered tradition sometime thereafter. G.B. Grayson, a Tennessee fiddler and descendent of one of the tragedy's principals, recorded it in the 1920's. A decade later Frank Proffitt, a rural North Carolina performer, taught it to Warner and his wife Anne, then on a song-collecting journey to the south. They, in turn, brought it into the revival, introducing it to Guthrie, Seeger, Alan Lomax and others in the north's politicized folksong movement, where it served the left as one more link to

"the people." By 1947, when Lomax published the song in Folk Song U.S.A., one could hear it regularly at the Sunday afternoon folksinging gatherings then popular in Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park.[20]

Despite burgeoning commercial activity and a growing mass audience, fervent folk music activism in the fifties remained the province of a relatively small, quasi-bohemian subculture populated largely by left-leaning true believers. Strictly speaking, they were popularizers themselves but many knew something about the underpinnings of folklore, voiced respect for the importance of heritage and often tried to learn the history of a song and those who sang it. The emotional closeness of this group helps explain the fierce anger that the most committed directed toward Ives and Brand, who some believed challenged not only a political ideology but the cohesiveness of the folk family itself. Harry Peter Traum, known to all as "Happy", a young guitarist and eventual recording artist, music teacher, journalist and entrepreneur, found his way into this scene in 1954, the year he turned 16. Initially Traum took the subway to the Village from his Bronx home, simply to join the informal Sunday afternoon music making in Washington Square. Friendly, eager and talented, he soon found himself in the thick of the heady Village folk music world, participating in countless informal sings and jam sessions through which aficionados coalesced into the vibrant scene that ultimately became world famous through the success of Dylan and Peter, Paul and Mary.

Before the intrusion of money and fame, this was a world in which status could depend on little more than the ability to unearth a ballad more ancient or unknown than those discovered by your friends. "For a lot of people," Traum recalls, "the mark of status was finding a song or an old ballad that nobody else knew . . . It was a real feather in your

cap if you could sing a song that nobody ever heard of, especially if it was a nice one." He remembers poring through printed folksong collections, hunting for the perfect tune with which to establish his own taste, commitment and diligence. Finding what he thought was the ideal candidate, he labored to memorize the words and craft an impressive guitar arrangement. Unfortunately, the song he chose was "The Water Is Wide," a spiritual that had already attained broad circulation in revival circles. Only when he saw his friends' amused reaction did he realize that everybody knew the song. "It was so deflating."[21]

Traum's youthful immersion in the Village's musical life was possible due to an environment that welcomed any pleasant person with sufficient devotion. It was a scene marked less by antagonism to commerce than by the sheer absence of meaningful commercial possibility. Performances in Washington Square were unpaid, free to watch and viewed by musicians and observers alike as little more than a chance to relish music and friendship. In the evenings or during inclement weather the party simply moved elsewhere. The local American Youth Hostel, where Traum met his wife, and the Labor Temple on Manhattan's 14th Street each served as alternatives to the Square. These were not concert halls but large, gym-like facilities that functioned as places to gather, pass a guitar around and sing. Groups would split off from one another and perform in different styles, the competing sounds bouncing off the walls. "It was cacophony," Traum remembers, with real warmth in his voice. Only a few participants were committed political activists. Most, like Traum, merely shared in the "general sort of leftwing flavor," expressing a belief in peace, civil rights and social progress. [22]

A few promoters presented formal concerts but the Village of the time lacked sufficient professional venues for staged folk music performances. Storefronts and churches substituted for clubs. Extremely popular were the little theatres, which were not available for concerts until around midnight, after the evening's theatrical presentation had ended and the folksingers could take over the house. Featured attractions, said Traum, consisted of "traditional people that happened to live around New York . . . and then a lot of revival people." He saw Elektra artists Cynthia Gooding and Oscar Brand perform in such settings, a thrill because they had recorded long before folk music reached mass popularity, though their sales were non-existent by later pop-folk standards. "One of the unforgettable concerts at the Circle in the Square that I heard back then was Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Rev. Gary Davis on the same show. It was really an amazing show. I'll never forget that one." The audiences, and some of the performers, were the same people who gathered in Washington Square and its indoor alternatives. Everywhere you went, recalled Traum, you would see someone you knew. It was a thoroughly social scene, marked by a cohesiveness borne of the participants' belief that they were an elect. "We felt like we were part of a real something happening . . . In the forefront of something, sort of in the vanguard of some kind of a movement, but only we knew about it. It was something very special."[23]

In 1958 The Kingston Trio altered this subterranean scene irrevocably when it released its version of "Tom Dooley." Other than the label "folk music," the group seemed to have little in common with the more committed Greenwich Village folk devotees. While the latter hovered on the edge of bohemia, the Trio committed the unpardonable sin of dressing in uniform or at least matching, creased, pinstriped shirts

that might as well have been uniforms. Moreover, they seemed to have no understanding of what was important about the song, shortening the story and delivering what was left in a polished, well-modulated vocal style that utterly effaced its Appalachian origins. On stage they augmented their clean-cut appearance and relatively bland musical approach with glib patter and silly jokes that evoked the dreaded Tin Pan Alley. Time magazine summarized the overall effect as a "slick combination of near-perfect close harmony and light blue humor." Compounding these sins, the Trio had no apparent politics whatsoever. In a post-boom interview banjoist Dave Guard revealed that they once flirted with performing some Spanish Civil War songs because they sounded "ballsy." But "our manager said, 'If you do that, it will bring all sorts of people around here.' We said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Don't even worry about it.' Politically, we didn't know what was going on."[24]

It was particularly galling to the committed that this flagrantly inauthentic, apolitical, hopelessly uncool show business "product" proved phenomenally successful. In late 1958, when Pete Seeger's opposition to McCarthyism forced him to battle a felony conviction and guitar sensation Blind Gary Davis had to hunt for small performance venues, The Kingston Trio took "Tom Dooley" to Number 1 on the pop charts, selling almost four million singles, the first of a string of successes. In their wake came the imitators—The New Christy Minstrels, The Highwaymen, The Brothers Four and others—all equipped with polished acts, polished clothes, polished repertoires and lucrative contracts. The immediate reaction of the folk cognoscenti was to ignore these pretenders and, when that grew impossible, to mock them. As Traum put it, "we certainly turned up our noses at The Kingston Trio" and their ilk. "They barely entered our

consciousness, except for the fact that we knew they were making all that money." The more caustic Van Ronk recalls sneering references to "The New Crunchy Monsters" and describes the general reaction of his peers as, "These people wash too much." "We were," he went on, "needless to say, very, very critical. One thing, we had a grittier worldview than [the commercial groups]. For another thing, we either truly disliked, or affected to dislike, the audience that they were reaching for." [25]

Most of that audience was content to enjoy pleasant, accessible pop. Drawn to so-called folk music by vocal groups that made all songs sound the same, they had no interest in—or, in all likelihood, inkling of—the distinction between a Child Ballad, a spiritual and a delta blues. Others dug deeper into the repertoire, fascinated by the idea of the folk and aware that a cultural wellspring lay beneath the titles that the folk-poppers homogenized. One who took a somewhat circuitous route to the roots was rock and roll lover Neil Rossi, who eventually recorded one of the first Rounder Records releases as a member of the old-time revival band, The Spark Gap Wonder Boys. Still in high school when the boom struck, and devoted to rock's "exuberance and joi de vivre," Rossi viewed the Trio's music as just another bland variant of the day's formulaic, highly stylized pop. He was unaware that their songs were in any sense, however attenuated, "part of a continuing tradition." Still, the music was easy to play and certainly popular, and young Rossi was soon performing with a high school Kingston-clone. Later, after literally stumbling upon southern bluegrass on the radio, he recognized musical phrases from the pop folk music with which he had grown familiar. "Knocked out" by all forms of early country music, he soon discovered the links between traditional tunes, early commercial country and revivalism. In the face of such experiences, even staunch critic Van Ronk

concedes, albeit hesitantly, that the commercial success of the Kingston-clones provided a great deal of opportunity for other elements of revivalism. "There's no question but what they were doing was good for all of us. And we knew that, on the one hand. But on the other hand, fuck 'em. So we knew it. And so we were very ambiguous about it. One moment we'd be defending them, and the next minute we'd be attacking them."[26]

Ultimately, the boom created a world of professional opportunity that reached far beyond urban bohemians and whitewashed folk superstars. While Traum and his friends could find few places to play in the mid-fifties, by 1962 a well-defined circuit of folk clubs and coffeehouses had developed across the U.S. Simultaneously folk music festivals became commonplace and some of them—Berkeley, Newport, Philadelphia and Chicago, in particular—showed real zeal in presenting performers who drew their music from their own lived traditions. Committed activists—usually young musicians, not trained folklorists—brought rural southern performers to the attention of this expanding northern and urban audience. Ralph Rinzler, a onetime Swarthmore student and mandolinist in the bluegrass-oriented Greenbriar Boys, took over the management of then-fading bluegrass patriarch Bill Monroe, rejuvenating his career. Rinzler also jump-started the professional career of now legendary North Carolina guitarist Doc Watson and brought Cajun music to the Newport Folk Festival, helping to spur a renewed interest in Cajun traditions in their Louisiana base. Particularly delightful from a romantic standpoint were the "re-discoveries"—recording stars from the twenties and thirties who had dropped from public view, whom fans located and brought to revival prominence. Clarence Ashley, Gus Cannon, Dock Boggs, Sleepy John Estes and Mississippi John Hurt had all appeared on Smith's Anthology and now, to the utter astonishment of

devotees, they demonstrated their sometimes still-stunning abilities on coffeehouse stages. Van Ronk's reaction to Hurt's appearance was typical. "At that point we all assumed that John was dead. When he emerged . . . alive and picking, it was exactly like a dream."[27]

Multifaceted, the revival also encompassed the political song movement—that direct link with Guthrie and his People's Songs companions that, through the songs of Phil Ochs, provided me with my first knowing exposure to folk music. In 1961 Pete Seeger visited England, where the political songwriting he found impressed him enormously. He wondered if people were quietly writing such songs in the U.S. A few topical tunes appeared in Sing Out! but, at the time, the magazine highlighted mostly apolitical traditional lyrics. Spurred by Seeger, two of his old friends from the days of The Almanac Singers began publishing Broadside, a mimeographed periodical of topical songs. Carrying the subtitle "a handful of songs about our times," it debuted in February 1962. In retrospect, the most important tune in that first issue was "Talkin' John Birch," an attack on reflexive anti-communism written by 21-year-old Bob Dylan, then unrecorded and unknown. It was the first publication of a Dylan song. Over the next two years he placed 20 additional songs in the magazine's pages, stimulating his growth as a writer. [28] Also in 1962, in one further sign of a new era, The Kingston Trio had a minor hit with Seeger's "Where Have All The Flowers Gone," which peaked at number 21 on Billboard's Hot 100. It was Seeger's first appearance on the charts in a decade, albeit as a writer, and there is no evidence that it caused any particular national uproar. Perhaps this lack of concern was because the song's message—that war is a terrible thing—was so benign. Perhaps it was because the Trio's clean-cut, apolitical presentation obscured

whatever political impact the song or its authorship might have had. However it is difficult to believe that the record would have been uncontroversial in, say, 1955, when Seeger was brazenly defying Congressional red-hunters.

Over the course of the next several years the topical song movement helped alter the nation's vocabulary. Seeing commercial potential in the growing number of topical performers, the popular culture industry embraced, or at least marketed, the idea of socio-political change. In January 1963 High Fidelity magazine ran a flattering profile of Seeger. Discussing his contempt conviction in detail, it emphasized his "strong feeling for justice" and his "moral integrity," implying that he was better than his critics. Later that year, Time reported that that "all over the U.S. folk singers are doing what folk singers are classically supposed to do—singing about current crises." Not since the Civil War, said the magazine, had they done so "in such numbers or with such intensity." That same month, a Look profile of the highly political Peter, Paul and Mary reported that the group represented a new breed of urban folk singers who, working within "the tradition of social-protest folk songs," attempted to present "music significant for today." A "whole generation of young Americans," Look claimed, were "singing [topical] songs, listening to them and buying records." Dylan's popularity soared amidst an avalanche of flattering publicity. Life called him the "most important writer of folk songs in the last 20 years [whose] biting protests against poverty, injustice, segregation and war are revitalizing a folk movement that was bogging down in dying cowboys and blue-tail flies."[29]

My own experience with Ochs, one of the lefts' cultural favorites, convinces me that mass marketed topical music served a valuable function. It neither converted the

right wing nor altered the established economic order, but it articulated concerns and fostered a sense of shared goals among those predisposed to accept the message. Sociologist Richard Flacks, a lifetime folk music fan and founding member of Students for a Democratic Society, offers a perspective informed by his multiple roles as listener, activist and scholarly observer. The anti-Vietnam War movement, Flacks writes, "could not have become a popularly based mass movement simply as a result of the exertions of SDS and other ideological leftists. The cultural climate made mass protest possible by creating a widely shared ethical framework for resistance and solidarity among young people."[30] Within this cultural climate, those artists who generated the most criticism from the left tended to be the most flagrantly commercial. Factions, however, were not always clear-cut. Despite a major label record contract and huge success, Peter, Paul and Mary maintained some credibility within the mainstream left because they were vocal about their beliefs and participated in many political benefits. Some activists enjoyed The Mitchell Trio, smooth harmonizers who recorded several pieces of scathing political satire, including pointed attacks on the anti-communist zealots in the John Birch Society and on Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. The hugely successful Dylan maintained credibility because his rough-hewn, politically charged early work was so clearly in the Guthrie tradition and his success seemed to come despite a thoroughly non-commercial persona.

Still, the gnawing issue of exploitation hovered over the scene as all types of artists sought to capitalize on the "protest song" vogue. The previously apolitical Highwaymen recorded Buffy St. Marie's anti-war song "Universal Soldier," and the politically timid Kingston Trio released "Time To Think," an entire topical album. The

mainstream record industry pursued unseemly ad campaigns, suggesting that purchasing their products constituted a meaningful political act. A print ad for the Kingston Trio's single "Ally-Ally Oxen Free," which addressed racial trouble in the south, called the song "a stirring and timely ballad." The group that once avoided politics was now advertising its social conscience. An ad for The Highwaymen's "Universal Soldier" consisted of an open letter from the president of United Artists Records, who made the patronizing and transparently ludicrous claim that he was writing because he felt so strongly about the song's "message of vital importance." Dylan, who some viewed as the ultimate exploiter, was himself ripe for exploitation. Using the caption "Be Different—He Is," a 1965 Columbia Records memorandum suggested promoting the artist in stores that sold other products supposedly associated with him, such as sunglasses, blue jeans and boots. It went on to urge the placement of album ads in unexpected sections of the newspaper, suggesting the financial pages because, "after all, he does mean money . . . for us at least."[31]

Throughout the boom Sing Out! served as a forum for seemingly never-ending battles over the impact of popularization. In the spring of 1959, right on the heels of "Tom Dooley's" success, the magazine published "Commercialism and the Folk Song Revival," an essay decrying the influence of overly commercial popularizers and painting a devastating portrait of the new folk aficionados:

> [They] sing songs of love, pity, miners, farmers, chain gang prisoners and the like, all with the same beat and without any understanding of what the songs are talking about, how they developed, or why people sing them. Often, this type of person will get quite upset about the inclusion of a union song at a college folk-sing because it might 'antagonize' some people and not be accepted by all present. [32]

"In Defense of Commercial Folksingers," which appeared in Sing Out! in 1962, posits a more forgiving scenario. This article credits The Kingston Trio and other popular artists with bringing traditional songs to those who would never have heard them otherwise. "Without the newer groups folk music would not be on everyone's lips today. It would still be lying dormant in its own clique. This is not right . . . Just be glad that through their hard work and fine talent, folk music has taken its rightful place in American culture."[33] The pendulum kept swinging. In 1963, when the revival was arguably at its peak, a Sing Out! editorial complained about the impact of commercial success on folksong's heritage as true community music:

> Folk music today is what appears on the pages devoted to 'folk' in Billboard. Folk music today is what is sung by a performer with an unamplified guitar. Folk music today is anything with the word 'Hootenanny' in its title. Folk music today is what Jack Linkletter presents on ABC-TV. Folk music today is what any self-proclaimed 'folk-singer' sings. . . The Hootenanny of yesteryear has become the Lootenanny of 1963. [34]

Sing Out! had its own faults. Though it made a reasonable effort to present all facets of the revival, it was capable of romanticizing traditional artists to an absurd degree. A profile of North Carolina performer Frank Proffitt, the man who introduced "Tom Dooley" to the revival, is typical. Though the article attempts to convey some of the difficulties of Proffitt's rural, working-class life, it still casts him as an idealized mountain knight, a virtual embodiment of a romantic literary hero: "He speaks slowly, quietly, and in the idiom of early 19th Century America, with phrases that delight the ear and mind . . . His intelligent grasp of ideas, his amused and compassionate understanding of people, his fun and humor, the iron of his own integrity, are a source of constant satisfaction to his friends." Similar in tone is a feature on the elderly Virginia balladeer

Horton Barker. The piece reveals nothing of how Barker, blind since childhood, survived up to the point at which the Chicago Folk Festival introduced him to a large revival audience. It does, however, explain that he possessed the "unpretentious dignity" that, for reasons left unexplained, was "so often a characteristic of the traditional ballad singer." Visitors to the home of this "genuine mountain man" would "probably find [him] sitting on the porch of the little house he shares with his sister and her husband." There "he might sing a ballad for you. On the other hand, he might choose to quote some Shakespeare or some Homer for you, instead."[35]

While these portraits may have contained kernels of fact, they emphasized details that presented their subjects as cardboard saints. Sing Out's readership, however, was miniscule. Despite steady growth as the revival gathered steam, circulation hovered around 15,000 at the beginning of 1964. Most Americans gained their understanding of the boom from mass marketed media sources, which offered reportage varying widely in quality and depth. Today, the aversion to commercialism that lingers within the revival is, I believe, at least a partial reaction to the more distorted and disrespectful media coverage found during the sixties boom. Time and Newsweek, with a combined circulation in the millions, were particularly demeaning. Both offered fairly extensive revival coverage and both tended to explain the phenomenon in extraordinarily superficial terms, treating folk music as little more than a transitory commercial product—the latest popular craze in an eternally ongoing cycle of popular crazes. Neither magazine did much to suggest that folk music had a function beyond the selling of products, musical or otherwise. In this manner they did not merely report on the revival's commercial aspects but encouraged them to the exclusion of any deeper presentation of the movement's cultural or political

importance. It was an approach that made a mockery of Seeger's hope, expressed almost a generation earlier, that folk music could help "circumvent . . . the music monopoly of Broadway and Hollywood." A look at some of the worst excesses within these popular magazines can help us understand the fears of those who still resist the commercialization of folk.[36]

Time's narrow focus on folk music's profitability had begun at least as early as the mid-fifties "calypso boom." In 1957 it reported the details of Harry Belafonte's lucrative record, television and movie contracts and announced that he had become "the briskest selling item in show business." A 1958 profile of Barbara Dane, a blues singer with a revival following, stated that she was "on the brink of the big time." In July 1960 it reported that The Kingston Trio was "the hottest group in U.S. popular music," and could command $25,000 per week if its members would only agree to play Las Vegas. Occasional disagreements among the group members stemmed neither from politics nor the proper role of heritage but "about business, what to invest in." The litany of commercial superlatives continued. Readers learned that Flatt and Scruggs, "the most popular dispensers of bluegrass in the business . . . now make nearly $100,000 a year apiece." The Limeliters, Time claimed, had sung their way to an "expanding fortune." The Highwaymen reportedly earned $2,500 per appearance, while their hit record brought them "cash boxes full of unexpected gold." Time celebrated The Clancy Brothers for their "briskly selling Columbia album" and claimed approvingly that Joan Baez had turned down $100,000 per year in bookings.[37]

Newsweek also treated the creation of profit as the revival's most significant contribution to American society. In a mid-1960 feature entitled "It's Folksy. . . It's

Delightful, It's A Craze," it reported that Jimmie Driftwood, a former Arkansas high school principal, increased his income from $3000 to $100,000 per year after he began composing pop songs that had the sound of the "authentic." That same article noted that Pete Seeger, Theo Bikel, the revitalized Weavers (featuring a Seeger replacement) and Odetta had become stars who could fill large halls. In numerous other articles, it provided detailed coverage of the earnings of Bikel, The Kingston Trio, The Clancy Brothers and The Chad Mitchell Trio. An article on Peter, Paul and Mary not only discussed their income but emphasized Mary's sex appeal, describing her as a "striking 5' 9" blonde with wide eyes, a generous mouth and a husky voice."[38]

De-emphasizing the revival's more bohemian roots, Time and Newsweek focused the bulk of their coverage on the movement's most middle-of-the-road aspects. Time, for example, assured presumably concerned readers that while the members of The Kingston Trio had once been somewhat wild, such behavior was part of a now vanished past. College, marriage and success had brought "stability" and "purpose" to the Trio and turned them into "gentlemen."[39] That magazine's obsession with college as a mark of legitimacy reached absurd extremes. A 1961 article on The Limeliters entitled "The Faculty" stressed that all members of the group were serious scholars. One, who held a Ph.D. in musicology, was "consciously gathering money so he can return to the college world." Old-time-music revivalists The New Lost City Ramblers were "a trio of college men." Buffy St. Marie was "an honor student" and singer Biff Rose "looked like a joker who might have flunked out of Yale, but actually is a 1959 graduate of Loyola University in New Orleans." In a straight-faced article that could have passed for parody, Time stressed that the members of The Highwaymen—who purportedly refused to tour while

classes were in session—were hardly "campus misfit[s] with a guitar." They were, instead, pre-law students, fraternity officers, charity workers, golfers and pole vault champions.[40]

The newsmagazines tended to minimize the revival's political overtones, often presenting them as little more than a youthful affectation akin to the early "wildness" of The Kingston Trio. In "Hoots and Hollers on the Campus," Newsweek managed simultaneously to trivialize the revival's political roots while consigning any activism to a less mature past. It noted that in the thirties "'folk' implied people and The People was the pet sentimentality of the radical movement." Such "pet" sentiments, the magazine assured its readers, had dissipated: "Political lines are less clear now. . . [though] the old feeling remains. . . Not surprisingly, some folk singers are pure beatniks, but a sizable proportion are"—no surprise here—"typically collegiate, devoted to button-down shirts and J. Press suits as well as peace and equality." Putting aside the condescension inherent in a phrase like "pet sentimentality," there was, to be fair, some truth in Newsweek's characterization of the sixties folk audience. The truly pernicious aspect of this story was the manner in which it diminished deeply held political beliefs, implying that even devoted activists were quick to sell out for commercial gain. A quick reference to Pete Seeger's conflict with Congress reported that he had involved himself "uncomfortably" with investigative committees while, in a financial sense, he had involved himself "comfortably with the folk-singing cult." Newsweek's message was twofold: (1) Seeger had grown up, along with the rest of the once immature radicals and (2) Seeger was a hypocrite, whom readers could discount as a political force.[41]

This approach also typified Time's coverage of revival political activism. It called Seeger "an ardent left-winger, [who] once sang industrial songs, [but] now is better known for Appalachian ballads." It was as if an early fling with activism had passed. A 1958 piece on Barbara Dane reported that she had "mastered a few folk songs" when first out of high school in the mid-forties and, "because nobody else in town knew them," "found herself" singing for organized labor. Thus, Time presented her political activity as an accident of youth—almost outside her control. In fact, Dane fused art and politics quite deliberately, knowingly diminishing her own commercial potential. At the revival's peak, for example, she refused to sing blues lyrics that presented women as sexual objects. Unable to reconcile her ideology with its representation that she was "on the brink of the big time," Time trivialized her politics.[42] In the same vein, the magazine mocked Odetta's political beliefs as unjustified by a supposedly comfortable life: "Despite the blues, the anger and the protest that are part of her folk repertory, the world is not being dreadful to Odetta." Making the unsupported claim that the Clancy Brothers had once belonged to the revolutionary Irish Republican Army, it branded them as hypocrites who had discovered that "old style revolution [was] not nearly so lucrative as recording or touring." Even the audience was fair game. A sarcastic report on the 1964 Newport Folk Festival equated political passion with both the need to conform and youthful angst about love, each of which is typically outgrown: "[The crowd was] outfitted not only with identical uniforms but with a mutual set of convictions that decry the injustices of war, segregation and cheating hearts."[43]

As they trumpeted the revival's smoothest, most commercial sounds, both magazines emphasized the "otherness" of indigenous rural music, highlighting its

supposed eccentricity, while infantilizing vernacular musicians as backwoods bumpkins with funny accents. Illustrative is a 1961 Time piece on bluegrass, spotlighting the preeminent duo of Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. Five years earlier, Mike Seeger had treated this music with reverence in his Folkways Records' compilation, American Banjo Scruggs Style. To Time, however, it was simply "a particularly corny style of country music" and the musicians were "a couple of hillbillies." Flatt had a "sow-belly voice" and Scruggs' masterful picking style, which inspired the title of Seeger's record, reportedly "moved one astigmatic observer" to compare the banjoist with Paganini. Newsweek showed even less taste when it mimicked the accent of one well-known performer: "Mah name is Jean Ritchie, and Ahm from Kentucky. [I'll play] an old murder song come down through our family fur generations." Such demeaning humor was consistent with the magazines' focus on marketability as the true measure of folk music value. Notwithstanding the success of Flatt and Scruggs, the pop groups were the real moneymakers. Someone like Ritchie performed regularly on the festival circuit and in select clubs but never earned money on the scale of, say, The Kingston Trio. Recognizing this, Time repeated a widespread joke that characterized a traditional artist as any performer who earned less than $10,000 per year. [44]

Not all mainstream news coverage was as skewed and demeaning as that summarized above. But such coverage was sufficiently ubiquitous that it supported the worst fears of those most concerned about commercialism's destructive impact. For them, the great boom simply was not worth it if it led to a distorted understanding of folk music and the ridicule, as opposed to the appreciation, of vernacular culture, political idealism or both. Inevitably, the problem receded as the pop culture machinery moved on.

Traditional music adherents remained but the record industry, the media and the broader public shifted their attention, creativity and money away from folk music and toward the British Invasion and rock in general. Dylan's famous electric set at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival illustrated this movement but hardly initiated it. By the end of the sixties, shuttered coffeehouses and empty festival grounds testified to the collapse of a phenomenon that, only a few years before, provided legions of collegiate blues shouters and banjoists with places to play and, in some cases, a semblance of a living. Economics—meaning the desire to earn money through the commercial juggernaut of rock—was a factor in this demise but more than that was in play. To varying degrees, musicians, promoters and record executives were worn down by folk revival battles, with the corresponding need to worry about the authenticity of the songs and styles they presented. Many of these were young people in the process of learning and even those who continued to value traditional music wanted to do more than perfect forms pioneered in other times and places.

Like many others, Happy Traum agonized over perceived conflicts involving authenticity, change and commercialism. In the early sixties he was part of the New World Singers, a politically-oriented acoustic group "very much in the Seeger tradition" that had minor professional success on the folk performance circuit of the day. Signed to Atlantic, the group recorded one acoustic album that went nowhere. Famed impresario Ahmet Ertegun, one of Atlantic's founders, urged them to record an electric follow-up, but the group was unable to take that plunge. Thirty years later, Traum recalled their hesitation with resigned and good-humored regret:

> . . . they wanted us to put more electric guitar in there and all that stuff I thought was horrible-–what a terrible idea. Now that I think of it I'm really sorry because Ahmet Ertegun was our producer and I feel—I have for years felt—stupid about not listening more to him.
>
> . . .
>
> There was a lot of stuff about being commercial and that was why, when I was in the New World Singers, we were so opposed to adding an electric guitar and an electric bass because we felt it was so-called commercial and not purist. And I think that was really something that people thought a lot about.[45]

Eventually Traum concluded that debate over whether a song was properly considered a folksong or was performed with sufficient authenticity of style was both "boring" and "undemocratic." Neither he nor most of his peers could resist the lure of new sounds and wide-open creative possibilities. Not surprisingly, Traum traced his personal change of heart to the excitement stirred by The Beatles. "At first we looked at The Beatles with sort of wry amusement. But it caused a buzz right away. I think it was a very short time after The Beatles hit that people started plugging in . . . Most of us were pretty opposed to it, but by 1965 I was in an electric rock and roll band, so it didn't take long to drop that sort of judgmental outlook."[46]

Dylan famously helped lead the charge away from sectarian folk music wars that seemed increasingly nonsensical within the commercial sphere. His early political anthems had made him a member of the folk music elect, and the very fact that he had been accepted so quickly into the ranks of the chosen underscored the sense of betrayal felt by some. But to others—musicians and audiences who did not consider themselves chained to folkloric or political orthodoxy—the old scene was growing tiresome. Seeger was respected for his energy, his dedication to song and his battle with McCarthyism, but

he was in his mid-40s when Dylan's new music emerged. His highly orchestrated Weavers' hits sounded like archeologic relics and his thoroughly conservative personal style failed to mesh with a burgeoning youth movement attracted simultaneously to the beats and the emerging counterculture. Though still lionized, Seeger's image among youth was that of a heroic uncle—cooler than the typical uncle, perhaps, but nonetheless of a distant generation. Dylan, on the other hand, blended words that sounded like the beats with a guitar that sounded like the Stones and a persona that looked like the future. The image of rebellion that initially attracted fans was, over time, only enhanced by his rebellion against folk orthodoxy. His new sound may have confused his Village peers initially but it was too exciting musically and personally to ignore. As Traum put it:

> Dylan started taking so many liberties with traditional songs, people started looking at it a little bit differently. I think in the fifties an awful lot of people said, 'if Pete Seeger sings it, it's folk music, and if he doesn't sing it, it's not,' as if he was the last word on what folk music was. And I think that was another real blind spot that people had, and I was one of those people for a while. I would say, 'Could this be a folk song? Well Pete Seeger does it, so it's probably okay.'[47]

Dylan's "liberties" led rapidly to the rise of the "singer-songwriter," that imperfect pejorative that divides the folk world to this day, which some folk partisans use to malign artists for the twin sins of self-absorption and commercial ambition. There have always been singer-songwriters and, on its face, the term is expansive and culturally neutral. Mick Jagger is a singer-songwriter but he works in a context so radically removed from the acoustic folk world that no one applies the phrase to him. In practice it is a folk revival term. Closer to that world, the early country star Uncle Dave Macon was a singer-songwriter, as was Mississippi bluesman Robert Johnson, and fans of traditional folk

music tend to revere both these artists. In part, this reverence is due to the long-lived revivalist bias for the old, the rural and the southern. In part, it is because Macon and Johnson, who were at the peak of their careers in the 1930s, drew much of their inspiration from older musical forms and lyrical motifs that circulated traditionally within their racial and geographic communities. Woody Guthrie was also a singer-songwriter. However, Guthrie not only utilized traditional tunes; he also wrote lyrics that empathized with the world's downtrodden, linking him to a "community" with which the revivalist left made common cause. The singer-songwriters so often disparaged today are those contemporary artists who exhibit no obvious connection to any vernacular tradition or political agenda but who instead write often confessional lyrics that explore not the larger world of community but the inner world of their own heart and soul. To many observers, Joni Mitchell's famed 1971 album Blue stands as the epitome of this confessional genre and certainly as an historical focal point.

The precise origin of the phrase "singer-songwriter" in this context is unknown to me. The term may have come from Elektra Records. In 1964 and 1965 the label issued a series of so-called "project" records—multi-artist anthologies that illustrated different stylistic facets of the ongoing boom. The final installment, entitled Singer-Songwriter Project, may be the first published use of the term. Notwithstanding the source of the phrase, Dylan is the primary reason that it is indelibly linked to the world of folk music. When he arrived in Greenwich Village in 1961 Dylan found a folk world that was, as Happy Traum recalls, wedded to a repertoire of older songs that could lay some claim to the mantle of tradition. Dylan tired of this quickly but knew that original composition was a radical departure from the accepted paradigm. He began thinking of composing

after witnessing multi-instrumentalist Mike Seeger's astonishing facility in performing the older material. It "occurred to me that maybe I'd have to write my own folk songs, ones that Mike didn't know. This," Dylan concluded, "was a startling thought."[48]

As we know now, the folk community embraced those early, mostly political songs, which seemed so thoroughly in the spirit of the celebrated Guthrie. Though they helped spark the topical song movement, that proved an insufficient accomplishment for Dylan. He moved quickly beyond what he referred to later with derision as "finger-pointin' songs" toward the often opaque streams of consciousness that presumably reflected his own interior world. Such tunes dominated his 1964 album, Another Side of Bob Dylan, which contained two songs—"My Back Pages" and "It Ain't Me Babe"—that many critics believe were direct slaps at a folk revival establishment that sought to constrain Dylan's art. Shortly after that album's release, Sing Out! editor Irwin Silber published "An Open Letter To Bob Dylan" in which he condemned what he considered two distressing and, he believed, related tendencies in Dylan's development. While praising Dylan's best topical songs as "inspired contributions which have already had a significant impact on American consciousness and style," he condemned newer tunes that "seem to be all inner-directed now, inner-probing, self-conscious—maybe a little maudlin or a little cruel on occasion." Silber speculated that fame, and the manner in which it separated Dylan from ordinary people, might be one cause of this negative change in artistic direction.[49]

While some agreed with Silber, others dissented. Writing in Broadside, one correspondent noted that "love, philosophy, etc." were as acceptable a topic for art as social protest. "These are all a part of life, part of living, part of creating—and you

shouldn't pigeonhole life into sections separate from each other."[50] Phil Ochs, to whom some hoped to pass the topical songwriting crown, came rapidly to Dylan's defense. Disdaining the tendency to argue about whose songs were better or more significant, he maintained that the "important thing is that there are a lot of people writing a lot of fine songs about many subjects and what concerns me is getting the best number of good songs from the most people." Turning to Dylan specifically, Ochs characterized his more recent writing "as brilliant as ever and . . . clearly improving all the time." Several tunes on Dylan's Another Side were, Ochs believed, "masterpieces of personal statement that have as great a significance as any of his protest material. How can anyone be so pretentious," Ochs asked, "as to set guidelines for an artist to follow?"[51]

Ochs' question reveals the manner in which Dylan's work transformed much of revivalist thinking. Now, for many who considered themselves part of the folk music world, a song or performance was not judged by its traditionality or vernacularity or topicality, but simply by the quality of its artistry. Critic Paul Nelson underscored this point in a passionate piece about the controversy surrounding Dylan's famed electric set at the 1965 Newport Festival. That performance, Nelson maintained, posed a choice. On one side, Nelson saw what he considered Pete Seeger's simplistic view of a world in which the idealized "People" would ultimately make everything right by joining hands and raising their voices in song. On the other lay Dylan's darker, more complicated and, to Nelson, more realistic artistic expression of a world "where things aren't often pretty, where there isn't often hope, where man isn't always noble . . ." To Nelson, Seeger was "a nice guy who has subjugated and weakened his art through his constant insistence on a world that never was and never can be." Dylan, by contrast, was "an angry, passionate

poet who demands his art to be all, who demands not to be owned, not to be restricted or predicted, but only, like Picasso, to be left alone from petty criticisms to do his business, wherever that may take him." "I choose Dylan," Nelson concluded, "I choose art."[52]

Thus, by the mid-sixties, among many of the revival's most avid young participants, status no longer rested on the discovery of a little known traditional gem. What mattered now was the depth and quality of the artistry with which one expressed one's personal viewpoint, political or otherwise. "People are demanding more of a folk singer," said performer Carolyn Hester in 1964. "You must stand up and say what you believe. . . It's no longer enough to sing someone else's songs. Writers, that's what's new in folk singing today." In 1967, while serving on the Board of the Newport Festival, Judy Collins was instrumental in presenting a main stage program entitled "Songwriters and the Contemporary Scene." Among those appearing were Joni Mitchell and Leonard Cohen, who presented their highly personal lyrics, largely devoid of explicit political slant or traditional elements. Years later, Collins recalled phrasing her proposal as a cutting slap at the old hierarchy. "You've got to stop living in a very isolated mode, in Lomaxland," she argued.[53] Collins' early recordings, like those of Hester, had leaned heavily toward the traditional Anglo-Saxon ballad repertoire. Now both performers helped demolish the historical definition of folksong—at least in the context of popular revivalism—arguing that it encompassed the personal creations of contemporary performers. Ironically Dylan escaped both the "singer-songwriter" and the "folksinger" labels. His perceived break with the folk world was so public and his leap to electric superstardom as the boom died was so pronounced that he entered forever the world of rock. In an "either/or" environment polarized by revival dogma, rock elitism and

marketing necessity, legions of guitar strumming, thoughtful singer-songwriters, who continued to perform in the quiet, acoustic style most associated with the boom, became known as folksingers and they remain folksingers to this day.

Others followed Dylan to the world of rock. Native Bostonian Peter Rowan had honed his considerable instrumental skills in the thick of the Cambridge scene, a milieu as charged as Greenwich Village with tension between orthodoxy and experimentation. In the mid-sixties the talented Rowan served a two-year stint as lead singer and guitarist with Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys. He returned to Cambridge in 1967, unsure of his next move. "All I knew is that I had written fifteen songs and that I wanted to play them." Recalling a reunion with fellow Cambridge revivalists, he said, "We were all a bit played out on Bluegrass because the closer you got you realized that [at the] end of that tunnel there was Bill Monroe saying, 'This is my music, not yours.' So at that time we were really up to play some new music . . . [T] he spirit of the times was to take your folk music and make a band of it, which we did . . . " One-time bluegrasser Rowan helped form an eclectic rock band, Earth Opera, which went on to tour with The Doors.[54]

The lure of new sounds and unparalleled commercial success altered the sense of community that had nurtured the revival's early years. A once close-knit world was inundated with strangers, both new audiences, clamoring to see the folksingers, and new performers, some exceedingly ambitious. Traum described the impact on the Greenwich Village folk scene:

> I don't think we knew that it would get as big as it did . . . I mean, obviously there had to be a growing audience for this stuff or else we wouldn't have had any place to play. Then it started getting very competitive which it never was before. I was never

> as much a part of that but I know it particularly got heavy when Dylan came on the scene and Peter, Paul and Mary, and there was suddenly big money and managers and agents. Then, the Monday night Hootenannies at Gerdes Folk City became unbelievably competitive. It was great music and it was exciting as hell but every night there'd be managers and agents and record company people, talent scouts, all that stuff around. . . .
>
> Everybody was kind of vying for the best spot. The best time to go on was like around 11 or 11:30; not too early cause people weren't there yet, not too late cause everybody had left by that time. Who's gonna hear you? It was all kind of amiable but there was definitely—it started to get into a competitive thing.[55]

Ultimately both the star system and the demise of community contributed to the disintegration of the Newport Folk Festival, the mothership of the popular festivals that had blossomed during the boom. The first Newport festival, in July 1959, attracted roughly 13,000 fans who enjoyed "a catalogue of current [folk] trends and styles," including blues (Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee), gospel (Rev. Gary Davis), bluegrass (Earl Scruggs), traditional Irish music (The Clancy Brothers) and Appalachian balladry (Jean Ritchie). The Kingston Trio headlined, Pete Seeger performed, and the largely unknown Joan Baez made her first major public appearance as the unscheduled guest of folk song popularizer Bob Gibson. In short, the festival encompassed the mix of traditional, political and popular that characterized the revival as a whole.[56]

In 1963 after a two year hiatus, organizers revamped Newport in an effort to de-emphasize reliance upon well-known professionals and present a greater number of "unknown but exciting and genuine folk performers." Though it still booked the

headliners needed to ensure crowds, the festival Board minimized the star system by paying all performers union scale plus actual expenses. The Board also added a number of smaller stages, in addition to a main stage, to better present relatively non-commercial styles and performers and to increase opportunities for performer/audience interaction.[57] The 1963 festival included 20 workshops and panel discussions designed to delve more deeply into instruments or musical genres. The result, exulted Sing Out!, was "an atmosphere of creative unity" demonstrating "the diversity of idioms, the maturation of the field in general, and, above all, the sheer fun of a weekend packed with good music."[58] Over the next few years, Newport developed into "a place of pilgrimage, where the faithful gather each year to renew their faith and leave to spread the good news."[59]

The revamped Newport Festival lasted seven years, ending after the 1969 event. It did not die because its fan base evaporated or because it could no longer attract the headlining acts needed to draw a crowd. It died because its efforts to accommodate the pop music world of the late 1960s were at odds with the romantic goals of preservation and egalitarianism that served as its raison d'être. Newport producer George Wein always understood the need for popular headliners who could support a bill dominated numerically by more traditional, less commercial performers. [60] Each year, following Dylan's infamous 1965 electric set, Wein increased the number of electric acts, leaning heavily on urban blues groups, presumably on the theory that they carried the scent of tradition.[61] While electricity attracted pop music fans, and many hailed it as nothing more than a normal stage in the folk process, it alienated those whose attraction to folk

revivalism stemmed from the idealized connection to pre-industrial America that lay at its core. Electricity was part of the music business, and many revival stalwarts—at least those not yet taken with garage rock—believed that it had little to do with homegrown, community music making. Moreover, the electric stars of the late sixties attained an iconic status far greater than anything experienced by the stars of the folk boom, with the exception of the wayward Dylan. The resulting celebrity was at odds with the "just us folks" communitarianism that previously had been a revival hallmark.

These various tensions played themselves out on the festival grounds. A record 70,000 people attended the penultimate 1968 festival, which the New Yorker's Ellen Willis characterized as an event in search of a rationale. Headliner Janis Joplin contributed to the overall sense of "orgiastic hero worship" that Festival organizers—who of course invited Joplin's appearance—claimed they wanted to avoid.[62] Striking a positive tone, critic Robert Shelton saw the nearly 20 workshops as the "heart of the festival, a chance to bring back the intimate dialogue between performer and listener that forged the way folk music began on the back porches and hearths . . ."[63] Willis, on the other hand, saw a system overwhelmed by electricity and the presence of stars. The concert-sized crowds at some workshops prompted her toward sarcastic reflection: "The workshops provided informal contact with performers, and everyone wanted informal contact with B.B. King, Taj Mahal and Janis Joplin . . ." Electricity proved unworkable in an open-air setting that tried to tolerate both urban blues and front porch fiddling. At a crowded blues workshop featuring the then relatively unknown Junior Wells and Buddy Guy, promoter Wein urged a lowering of the volume, which was interfering with other

workshops. "Kill the others!" shouted some of the less communitarian patrons. "Stop the other workshops." Wein surrendered and Guy invited the crowd to come see him in Chicago, where he assured them he would play even louder.[64]

The following year, which proved to be the Festival's last, disturbances at the Newport Jazz Festival earlier in the summer led a frightened community to impose onerous security measures, which sapped the Folk Festival treasury. The town also ordered all parks and beaches emptied by midnight, discouraging attendance by those who relied on impromptu camping in lieu of hotel reservations. Those optimists who arrived armed only with sleeping bags were forced to wander in search of some type of accommodation.[65] Overall, it meant a further darkening of the mood, which festival historian Cheryl Brauner characterizes as "an aura of suspicion and fear."[66] Pete Seeger, who had appeared at every Newport Festival, marked the 1969 event with a free concert at a nearby dockside, performing with friends on the deck of the sloop Clearwater, from which he championed a clean up of the Hudson River. He promised a series of such shows along the river in the coming months, assuring everyone that they would be free "because the Folk Festival has priced itself out of the American people."[67] Izzy Young, Sing Out! columnist and proprietor of Greenwich Village's Folklore Center, the movement salon, saw a divided festival, one at which commerce and the star system had carved a wedge between audience and insiders. In impassioned diary entries he criticized festival promoter George Wein for allegedly being "into the money scene and nothing else." He condemned a new security fence on the ground that it separated the audience from the performers and he attacked those performers who participated in an after hours

jam session that did not include the many paying customers who were huddled nearby in sleeping bags.[68]

Low on cash and under siege by its friends, Newport expired after the 1969 presentation. Across the continent the long-running Berkeley Folk Festival lasted a scant one-year more, ending in 1970 after 13 seasons. Coming of age in the San Francisco Bay Area of the 1950s, Berkeley Festival producer Barry Olivier, like Happy Traum and so many others, was the product of a modern, urban world who came to folk music as a staunch proponent of songs and styles that had survived from an earlier, more pastoral society. Describing the attitude held by him and his wife at the time of the festival's birth, he wrote:

> We loved the best of the music and wanted to define what was folk music and, by exclusion, what was not. We were concerned about a product of the folk music process—the finished, traditional, pure, real, good, old folk songs. With popularizers all about—the Kingston Trio and its school—we had almost a religious fervor in laying out what we considered to be real folk music, so it would be fully appreciated and so that people wouldn't waste their time and energy with the watered-down, 'impure' stuff.[69]

As the 1960s progressed, in the course of a journey akin to that of Traum, Olivier broadened both his tastes and his definition of folk music. In 1963 Pete Seeger awakened him to the contemporary songs of Bob Dylan, Tom Paxton and others. Olivier recalls this as "an important turning point in our consciousness and I could feel a change in people's feelings after that Festival." Fitting his enlarged tastes into his amateur folklorist's frame of reference, he saw the rise of new musical forms exemplified by Dylan and the Beatles

as part of a living folk process, adapted to the reality of a mid-twentieth century world that was awash in increasingly pervasive modes of mass communication. "Bob Dylan," he wrote, "was beginning to do some great songs and the Beatles were starting. There was a feeling in the air about contemporary songs, which could be so direct in their transmission of feelings from the singer to the listener . . . After 1963, we all looked forward eagerly to more contemporary songs and for the first time we were anxious to see the future of folk music."[70]

Moving beyond the many acoustic singer-songwriters who were blossoming in mid-decade, Olivier began presenting rock acts, beginning in 1966 with Jefferson Airplane. That year's Berkeley Festival was the most profitable ever. The following year he "consciously decided to emphasize electric rock music." The 1967 event featured six electric bands in addition to non-traditional acoustic performers such as Janis Ian and Richie Havens.[71] While Olivier saw this as consistent with folk music's new direction, it nonetheless collapsed any distinction between his festival and similar events staged by the popular music industry. In fact, he believes that the now famed Monterey Pop Festival, held six weeks before his own 1967 folk showcase, dampened attendance at the latter. Subsequent Berkeley Festivals restored the traditional balance a bit but Olivier was growing restless. In 1969 he produced a series of rock concerts for San Francisco music promoters. After the conclusion of the 1970 Festival, he spurned the offer—the first ever—of a small commercial subsidy if he produced a 1971 show, a payment that would have lessened the personal financial exposure he had faced repeatedly.[72] He was weary and his interests were drifting. He had changed, the Festival had changed, the landscape

of popular music had changed and it was, he concluded, “time for something new to arise.”[73]

It was not only large folk festivals that fell victim to changing times. In April 1968, before the demise of the Newport and Berkeley fests, the venerable Club 47 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, shut its doors. Opened in 1958, over the next half-dozen years Club 47 became ground zero of the thriving Cambridge folk scene. To outsiders the Club’s reputation may rest solely on its status as a primary launching pad for Joan Baez. Far more than that, it presented not only some of the era’s greatest singer-songwriters but also bluegrass, gospel, acoustic and electric blues, Appalachian guitar picking, jug-band music and more—what critic and musician Ted Drozdowski called "American folk music in all its incarnations."[74] Established as a not-for-profit private club in order to avoid restrictive licensing laws, Club 47 made membership available to all. Many regulars saw membership as "a point of pride" and considered the roughly 175-seat room an egalitarian place where performers and their audience could come "together in a cooperative atmosphere of mutual respect."[75] To other patrons, the club was not always a communitarian folk heaven. Like any ongoing organization, it had its insiders who could become possessive, even cliquish and cruel.[76] But for those with the interest and the personality to seize a role for themselves, or for those fans unconcerned about being on the inside, Club 47—part living room and part music school—was a welcoming neighborhood saloon, albeit one that served espresso in lieu of alcohol.

Like the Newport and Berkeley Folk Festivals, Club 47 fell before the onslaught of changing attitudes, the rise of the rock and roll star system and an increasingly

sophisticated "youth industry" that marketed entertainment on a massive scale. In the late sixties rock clubs started opening in greater-Boston, finding financial success while the communitarian Club 47 was, in the words of manager Jim Rooney, "still apologizing for charging $1.50 at the door."[77] By the summer of 1967, with increased competition from new venues, and with audiences more interested in bands than in solo folk performers, the club could not afford the fees of artists who now saw themselves as stars. Members of The Paul Butterfield Blues Band had grown up professionally within the folk world and were friends to Rooney and the club. They now demanded a $2000 fee for a six-night engagement. Rooney paid it once out of pride, unwilling to let a competitor have an act he considered one of his club's own. Still, it "broke the bank [and] that obviously couldn't go on." Exhausted after two stressful years of seven-day workweeks, Rooney resigned. His successor, Byron Linardos, considered relocating to a larger space and transforming the club into a multi-faceted arts center but ultimately surrendered. In a telling parallel to the later conclusion of Olivier a continent away, he said, "It was over. I think it went as far as it could without becoming something else."[78]

In truth, it was not over. Throughout America, disparate styles of indigenous music still thrived. Much of it was part of highly localized and thoroughly non-commercial scenes, such as the conjuntos played in the bars and community centers of San Antonio, Texas, or the polkas popular at wedding and anniversary parties in Cleveland, Ohio. The perpetuation of this music, which fit squarely within the historical definition of folk, had nothing to do with the commercial revival. The boom's passing did not affect it one bit. But large numbers of self-conscious revivalists kept at it as well, still relishing the old ballads, blues and banjo tunes that formed the movement’s heart. Many

people still enjoyed—if only for an evening—a brief journey to a romanticized vision of the American past. Others simply liked the sound of a fiddle or the clarity of a story sung well. Some received satisfaction from music that exemplified an ethnic or geographic heritage they admired. Others disliked the volume of rock or the milieu in which it was performed. Still others loved dancing that involved actual steps and partners they could touch, as opposed to the free-form abandon that marked the rock and roll ballrooms. Reflecting one of the revival's central contradictions, some felt bound to folk music by the movement's leftist coloration, while others reveled in tradition's rootedness and sense of conservatism.

What had changed was that folk music, per se, was no longer a commercial pop music phenomenon. Turning away from traditional songs that seemed to speak of "other" people, the industry moved to self-composed tunes that addressed the condition of the middle and upper-class consumers who purchased them. It moved to electricity and volume. It discovered financial possibilities that could best be realized by the development of sounds and stars big enough to fill the large, crowded and profitable performance spaces that people seemed willing to tolerate. While offering enormous commercial opportunity, those new sounds and spaces also possessed tremendous social value for consumers. By gathering large numbers of young people around a music that was undeniably their own, the rock industry helped foster a youth consciousness that, for good or ill, has altered life throughout the world. The new consciousness centered, in Abbie Hoffman's famous phrase, around the inchoate "Woodstock Nation," not a distant place occupied by others but a place of one's own—the idealized home of every self-selected member of the counterculture. Venue owners who desired to work within the

new industry paradigm, while maintaining a discernible identity as "folk," were suddenly adrift. At some intangible point in the mid to late sixties, a point that differed from scene to scene, venue to venue, such duality became at best extraordinarily difficult.

In May 1969, Happy Traum, then the editor of Sing Out!, published an article in Rolling Stone that discussed the passing of the "folk sound" from mass consciousness. As Traum saw it, the demise of folk as a commercial phenomenon was not all bad. It did, after all, hasten the end of all those spit-shined, homogenized folk groups, now hopelessly unhip relics of the past. Unfortunately, passing fads rarely discriminate. Many capable tradition-based musicians were also out of work. Even more tragic than the commercial setbacks of budding young professionals was the fate of the older country and blues performers whom the folk movement had "rediscovered." To quote Traum's sardonic characterization, they had been "dumped back on the farm (or wherever it was they came from) even though their contribution is still being felt. They are out of work just the same, and many are bitter about it." Still, an optimistic Traum saw promise. He saw it not only in America's still thriving vernacular artistry but also in a commercial world that the folk revival had forever transformed. Popular groups such as The Byrds, Canned Heat and The Band, among others, now drew freely from a vast array of traditional Anglo and African-American sources, accepting, in Traum's words, "what is good, without having to put self-conscious labels on it." Folk music, he wrote:

> . . . is no longer a thing to be set aside and regarded as a museum piece by anthropologists, left-wing politicians, and old record collectors. Partly as a result of the seeds planted by the so-called folk revivalists and partly because of a new and widespread interest in Black music (especially R&B and its country roots), folk music and its influences have been

> incorporated into the total picture of American popular music.[79]

Looking for a place in which this vernacular artistry could thrive commercially, Traum criticized America's "all-or-nothing" approach to popularity, in which the mass acceptance of one type of music seemed always to come at the expense of other styles. He called for a circuit of venues catering to specialized tastes, whether for folk music, jazz, chamber orchestras or performing poets.[80] Even as he wrote, the folk circuit he yearned for was forming and it continues today, represented by both new venues and those older forums that managed to survive the end of the great boom. In general, in this post-boom era, the more localized a performing folk music scene, the more ties it has to ongoing community activism and the less it tries to compete within the larger pop music arena, the more likely it is to thrive. Recalling the mid-sixties demise of the once thriving Boston scene, Neil Rossi commented:

> People who were listening to folk music because it was the current popular thing to listen to, stopped listening to it and they went and started listening to rock and roll. But there was still an active subculture of people who liked and listened to folk music. The Folk Song Society of Greater Boston was always very active, and they could fill a hall if you wanted to listen to [tradition based singers] Sarah Grey or Gordon Bok or whoever was popular at that time . . . You couldn't make a living at it but you could still go and pick up a few bucks and just have a good time.[81]

While the Berkeley and Newport Festivals died at the end of the sixties, the Philadelphia Folk Festival, which began in 1962, held its fortieth-annual gathering in the first year of the twenty-first century. That festival grew out of the Philadelphia Folksong Society, a non-profit, community-based organization that began in 1957, even before the

great boom seized public awareness. The Philadelphia society originated in The Gilded Cage, a coffeehouse with a comfortable back room where folk music aficionados of the late fifties gathered regularly. The three founders desired nothing more than to foster friendship and group singing. One of them, George Britton, recalled: "I wanted to do something for folk music. I thought this would bring together and afford a platform for young singers and people who didn't perform themselves, but who were very much interested in folk music. That it would give people a chance to meet." Bob Siegal, one of the earliest members, described a local Philadelphia scene much like that which the teen-aged Happy Traum encountered in New York:

> . . . in the fifties, there was [sic] only a few places to play folk music. It was not a major thing and the people who played seemed to get together with one another and then finally decided that they could do some things beyond, like bringing in performers from outside the city—traditional performers—and they got together as a folksong society—they founded an organization.[82]

Society members began the festival as a fundraiser for their own organization. In time, it grew sufficiently profitable to engage in a variety of local philanthropic activities. Among other things, festival proceeds have supported music therapy programs for emotionally disturbed children and have financed concerts by traditional performers in schools, nursing homes and orphanages. The Newport Festival also engaged in philanthropy but its orientation was national, not local, and its managing board consisted of music industry professionals who lacked routine contact with either one another or their host community. One individual, working with limited support, who struggled each year to earn a subsistence wage, produced the Berkeley Festival. In contrast to each of these, Philadelphia's festival was an adjunct to an ongoing community-based

organization that offered social and entertainment opportunities, as well as an opportunity for civic involvement. It was not an end in itself but a means to an end. As such, it should be no surprise that it managed to survive when folk music was no longer a national preoccupation.

Other surviving revival organizations displayed a similar interest in community along with a disinterest in the stars and machinations of the music industry. One such group was The Folklore Society of Greater Washington (FSGW), which District of Columbia folk music fans founded in 1964, hoping to encourage local performances by traditional musicians. The organizational meeting consisted of a couple of dozen friends gathered in a private home. Soon, newly elected officers established a charter membership rate of $5.00 per individual and $7.50 per family. For its first concert the group booked Seamus Ennis, a 45-year-old Irish piper and storyteller whose career, to put it simply, did not lend itself to pop stardom. When illness forced Ennis to cancel at the last moment, three Society members performed in his place, a perfectly acceptable alternative among people whose primary goal was participation and friendship. Almost forty years later, the FSGW still sponsors concerts of traditional music and, of perhaps greater importance, regular participatory events for its members and guests, often held in private homes. These are advertised in a monthly newsletter that contains reminders such as "Bring your favorite snack to share." Events include "English Country Dances," "open sings," semi-monthly gospel sings and "Storyswaps" designed to foster the sharing of tales. Built on a foundation of community fellowship, while avoiding the need for sound systems, excessive performance fees and large venues, the Society has carried on well beyond the end of the boom. [83]

Other enthusiasts, also acting before the boom's last gasp, formed other institutions, which they kept free of music industry excess. In the summer of 1966, one year after Dylan "went electric" at Newport, Bob and Evelyne Beers started the Fox Hollow Family Festival of Traditional Music and Arts on their own hilly parcel of land in New York's Adirondack Mountains. Described by one attendee as a "damn near perfect small trad festival,"[84] Fox Hollow, which ran annually until 1980, embodied the promise of community and non-commercialism that had gone astray at Newport, Berkeley and Club 47. In reviewing the 1967 gathering, Sing Out! concluded, "the one ingredient that sets this Festival apart from all the others is love," a love that was present "in such abundance and profusion that it is virtually inescapable." Putting this effusive romanticism in more tangible terms and striking a stark contrast with the last days of Newport, the reviewer's most lingering memory was of the "lack of fences." There was "no forbidden back-stage area . . . no special down-front section for the press . . . no police, no endless series of pass checkers and no need for them." Instead, one found at Fox Hollow "some of the finest family folk music you will ever hear . . . a wonderful spirit of cooperation, a close and friendly intermingling of audience, press and performers, a sense of belonging to and being part of the togetherness of the festival . . . " Others concur. Marlene Levine, a regular attendee, recalled that the "telling difference between [Fox Hollow] and others we'd been to was that there didn't seem to be a barrier between the performer and the audience." Bob Beers understood that someone had to be in charge but he managed to sculpt a participatory informality that encompassed everyone in attendance. Beers impressed Dick Levine, Marlene's husband, with the way he would "improvise" an appearance schedule, sometimes as late as an hour before the start of a

particular performance. "It was," Dick recalls, "a very easy arrangement of performers. He would have first-rate professionals with people who were barely amateurs." [85]

Across the country a dissatisfied, 26-year-old, Oakland, California pre-school teacher named Nancy Owens was searching for more fulfilling work. She enjoyed the bohemian atmosphere she had discovered on visits to New York's Greenwich Village and found a bit of that at Jabberwock, a Berkeley folk music club that arose during the early sixties. Jabberwock had not survived the onslaught of rock. By 1968 it had closed, along with the Cabale, described by one regular as a Club 47 spin-off that helped establish a "Cambridge-Berkeley link." Despite a complete absence of relevant experience, Owen decided that she would start a musical coffeehouse. In Berkeley she located a vacant storefront, retained the name of the used furniture store that once occupied the space and opened The Freight and Salvage in July 1968. With an official 87-person capacity, mismatched tables and chairs and a dressing room barely bigger than the tiny bathroom, Owens did not have to worry about attracting rock stars. Very quickly the Freight became known as a place to hear quality music and it drew a crowd of respectful listeners.[86]

The first act to take the stage was the Cleanliness and Godliness Skiffle Band, a Berkeley street aggregation that played whatever it liked, including Billie Holiday tunes, 1950s rock and roll and early rhythm and blues—all without electric guitars. With music that was predominantly acoustic and decidedly non-mainstream, and a physical environment that was small and, politely phrased, unpretentious, the Freight, in the words of Cleanliness and Godliness band member Annie Johnston, helped foster "a good, noncompetitive musical community." Unfortunately, it was never profitable. Owens

claimed a salary of $50.00 per week "when we could afford it." Needing to move on, she sold the club in 1978. It passed quickly through a couple of successors until 1983 when a coalition of musicians and patrons formed the Berkeley Society for the Preservation of Traditional Music, a non-profit corporation established expressly to purchase and run the venue. The resulting influx of energy, along with the non-profit's ability to solicit grant money and tax deductible contributions, allowed the club to hang on but did not insulate it from financial pressure. Needing to sell more tickets, backers moved the club to a new 240-seat venue in 1988.[87]

Through it all, The Freight's musical fare has stayed remarkably constant. The corporate name is convenient shorthand. While somewhat consistent with the club's regular offerings of bluegrass, old-time and, to a lesser extent, blues and gospel, it fails to convey the full story. The room has never confined itself to vanishing traditions. It presents a steady stream of the contemporary singer-songwriters who have been a mainstay of folk venues since the mid-sixties. Additionally, it mixes music from a wide array of American regional traditions with small doses of acoustic jazz, music from other lands, a capella vocalizing and oddball experimentation. The Freight's essence has never been traditionalism but a non-commercial, mostly acoustic eclecticism in a setting that conveys intimacy. To varying degrees, depending upon the evening and the performer, it embodies much of what passes for folklore in the twenty-first century—artistic communication in small groups, a connection to the past, a sense of community and an undercurrent of anti-corporatism that constitutes an implicit link to the revival's leftist heritage. In a real sense, it is the stage of Barry Olivier's Berkeley Folk Festival writ

small, recalling the days before the music industry captured the folk revival. This old ideal seems to be the "something new" that Olivier longed for when he ended his festival. Fittingly, Olivier himself has performed on the Freight stage on many a night.

One of the more successful post-boom folk music projects arose out of the one-time revival crucible of Greenwich Village. In the late-seventies, when punk and new wave garnered the lion's share of attention from Manhattan tastemakers, "the Village" meant the East Village, launching pad of The Ramones, Blondie, Talking Heads and Patti Smith. Greenwich Village, to the west, had faded from the consciousness of all but a few musical cognoscenti. As a result of the Stonewall Riot, it was known more as the birthplace of the Gay Liberation movement than as the one time "capital city" of folk music revivalism. Still, Gerdes Folk City hung on and was a center of that performing folk scene that did exist, a scene then dominated more than ever by contemporary songwriters. Folk City, however, booked headliners. It was not a place that offered fledgling writers and performers the opportunity to test their skills in a non-threatening, let-alone supportive, environment. To create such a place, locals formed the Songwriter's Exchange in 1977, a loose assemblage of artists who performed in several different cafés and held weekly meetings in musician Jack Hardy's Village apartment.

The catalyst for the Exchange was Hardy, a prolific songwriter who brought an intense focus and a propensity for hard work to his passions. Hardy moved to Greenwich Village in 1973 and he quickly set himself to the task of rebuilding the dormant folk scene there, in part to provide himself with an artistic home. Richard Mayer, an early Exchange participant, describes Hardy's role. "In the middle of everybody complaining

that they had no place to play, no one booking them or recording them, he'd say, 'O.K., let's build a club, let's have a weekly meeting, let's make our own album.' He said he was Tom Sawyer whitewashing the fence." [88] With Hardy presiding, the group critiqued new songs, often harshly, with the common goal of artistic improvement. As Hardy put it, "Endless hours were spent discussing and debating the songs and the process of writing." Inevitably friendships grew and the musicians "hung out, played softball, ate, drank, traveled, and caroused together. What emerged was a sense of community."[89]

The group produced Cornelia Street: The Songwriters Exchange, a compilation album featuring songs by several of these writer/performers, which garnered a positive review in the nationally distributed Stereo Review. "[T] hey are still out there," wrote critic Noel Coppage, "those troubadours with their simple acoustic backing, and Stash Records has made a beautiful little album with some of them . . ."[90] Eager to be heard, the group sought a stable performance venue from which they could build an audience. In August 1981 they founded the SpeakEasy Cafe in the backroom of a Middle-Eastern restaurant, steps away from the legendary Greenwich Village intersection of Bleecker and McDougal Streets. Managed by a cooperative of more than 50 musicians, led by a steering committee, "The Speak" presented music six nights per week. Generally, after the scheduled performance, co-op members and guests took to the stage "just for the fun of it."[91]

The restless and inventive Hardy next spearheaded the creation of another all-volunteer effort—a monthly periodical with the awkward title The Coop/The Fast Folk Musical Magazine. Dedicated to the promotion of quality songs, Fast Folk, which debuted in February 1982, devoted itself to the promotion of emerging artists. The

highlight of each issue, and the project's primary reason for being, was an accompanying record—later a CD—that usually featured songwriters performing original compositions. The name Fast Folk came from Hardy's insistence, at times over considerable dissent from craft-conscious performers, that the artistic process had to be accomplished swiftly. He wanted freshly written songs and, when he could get his way, he did not allow multiple takes when recording. He wanted inspiration, not the slightest hint of manipulation. "The whole idea was to do it fast," he said. "You could hear a song at an open mike or songwriters' meeting and two weeks later it was being played on the radio in Philadelphia or Chicago. It was urgent, exciting. It was in your face."[92]

In an account published in 1983, when the SpeakEasy and Fast Folk were going concerns, cooperative member Rod MacDonald discussed the personal meaning of the varied projects that had grown from the Songwriter's Exchange: "I'm sick of the attitude that folk music stopped being vital after the 1960's. That's before my time [and I think it's vital now] . . . Folk music is going public again here in the Village; and we're starting to hear from similar groups around the country, sharing information and good times. We're not trying to rehash the 60's though, it's the 80's and we want to move ahead, singing, writing, making the music we love."[93] The varied cooperative endeavors ended up having a national impact, succeeding beyond anyone's expectations. Starting in 1984 members presented annual Fast Folk Revues at The Bottom Line, then one of New York's premier music clubs. People across the nation purchased magazine subscriptions and songwriters from all regions sought recognition, leading to issues devoted specifically to local scenes stretching outward from New York to Boston, Maine, Toronto, Los Angeles and Texas. In 1985 Suzanne Vega, an early cooperative member

and the magazine's first subscription manager, released her major label debut and soon had a national hit with her composition "Luka." Other prominent artists whose early work appeared in Fast Folk include Steve Forbert, Shawn Colvin, Tracy Chapman and Nanci Griffith. Though shy of stardom, contributors such as John Gorka, Richard Shindell, Cliff Eberhardt and Lucy Kaplansky became staples on the national folk circuit, recording and touring regularly. The entire enterprise was a testament to the belief that an audience still existed for folk music of some sort and that, with sufficient organization and initiative, adherents could reach that audience.[94]

In Southern California during the late sixties and early seventies, another revival veteran struggled to retain his connection to folk music amidst a now more subdued local scene. Clark Weissman learned guitar in the late forties while a high school student in New York City. Following a well-trod path, he helped form his school's String and Frets Club, square danced on Saturday nights and enjoyed Sunday afternoons in Washington Square Park. As a student at MIT he met Peggy Seeger, Pete's sister, then at Radcliff and in 1955 he accompanied her on her first album, Folksongs of Courting and Complaint. He relocated to Los Angeles after graduation in 1956, where he took a job in aeronautical engineering. There, in 1958, he helped install the sound system for the Ash Grove, the small club that opened its doors in July of that year with a Brownie McGhee concert, on its way to becoming one of the revival's premier showcases.[95]

In the early 1970s Weissman was working as a research and development specialist in the computer software field. Still a folk fan, he often bracketed his frequent business trips with weekend excursions to nearby folk festivals. He belonged to an

informal folksinging club but felt frustrated that members were unwilling to do more than sing together. He wanted to offer music lessons and host concerts. During a stint as club president he discovered a large cache of unopened letters from folk societies around the country, many of which offered to swap newsletters or inquired about Los Angeles-area performing opportunities. He began to answer these letters and, as he traveled, he visited some of his newfound correspondents, discovering that many had common interests and concerns. One problem, of concern to both artists and fans, was the absence of suitable venues for relatively unknown but professional acoustic musicians, particularly those who favored more esoteric ethnic or regional styles. Weissman saw this problem in his own community. After a period of decline the Ash Grove had burned down in 1973. The strongest alternative was the 165-seat McCabe's Guitar Shop, a musical instrument store in Santa Monica that began a performance series in 1969. But McCabe's—which Weissman considered "a bit aloof"—focused on performers with some degree of public or industry recognition.[96]

Weissman and his wife Elaine decided they could fill a need. By moving the furniture in their large home they could host almost as many patrons as McCabe's, without the overhead of an ongoing business enterprise. Aided by their growing library of newsletters from local folk societies, they learned who was attempting to tour, discovering much new talent in the process. They began inviting people to play in their home, providing an audience as well as food and a place to stay. Musicians received a performance fee, raised through a modest cover charge, as well as the opportunity to sell cassettes and conduct fee-based workshops in songwriting or instrumental techniques.

While this provided one or two reasonable paydays, there remained the problem of prohibitive travel expenses for non-local performers. To justify the cost of a trip from, say, the East Coast, musicians needed more than the earnings from a single location. Thinking of Juniperro Serra's chain of missions, Elaine envisioned a chain of locally supported folk venues stretching up the west coast, which collectively could provide economic support for relatively unknown performers. Soon she was working with or simply encouraging other local ventures and ultimately she served as a booking agent, helping musicians organize tours along the California coast. The Weissmans continued presenting their own house concerts until 1994, when their home sustained significant earthquake damage. By then, they had other folk music business to keep them occupied.[97]

In 1980 officials of the Beverly Hills Department of Parks and Recreation sought the Weissmans' assistance in creating an outdoor concert series. Clark and Elaine took this opportunity to produce a one-day folk festival in a city park, which offered both performance and instruction. Invited back the following year, they expanded to two days. As the festival became an ongoing event the Weissmans organized the California Traditional Music Society (CTMS), a non-profit corporation set up to handle increasingly complex funding and logistics. In 2002 the annual CTMS Summer Solstice Festival spanned three days and utilized 25 "rings," or performance/teaching areas, which featured music, dance, story-telling and crafts from disparate traditions. In 1999 CTMS won a competitive award from the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, entitling it to lease an 1100-square-foot former firehouse, which the Society transformed into an

administrative and performance space housing an ongoing series of concerts, dances and participatory jam sessions.[98]

All of this grew directly from the Weissmans' desire to participate in a local folk music scene after the commercial revival had run its course. Reflecting on his more than 30 years of post-boom activity, Clark dismisses the idea that the end of the boom signaled the demise of a strong nationwide interest in folk music. It may have spelled the end of opportunities for large commercial success as a so-called folk musician, but wherever there were sufficient adherents folk music hung on as a small-scale and participatory activity. "Folk music," Clark believes, "by its nature is local and local activity never changed, and it still goes on and organizations that [Elaine and I have] had and so forth are just absolute proof that it never went away." Not only have the Weissmans' own endeavors thrived but Los Angeles is now home to an active group of contra dancers, a broad house concert scene and the singing circle that a restless Clark grew disillusioned with in the 1970s which, he reports, "still gets new people on board constantly." Clark and Elaine successfully harnessed this broad-based local energy in the late 1980s when they organized and hosted a conference of 130 folk music activists from across the U.S. and Canada—a gathering that became the founding meeting of the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance.[99]

Others also managed to turn their ongoing interests into national institutions, helping vernacular music survive and sometimes thrive as the media spotlight dimmed. Sing Out! carried on and its quarterly issues now exceed 200 pages in length, providing coverage of vernacular sounds from all over the world. The great boom had helped

revitalize bluegrass, a country music form that was fading by 1960, a mere 15 or so years after its birth. When the boom ended the music often received scant media attention. In 1966, frustrated at missing a nearby Stanley Brothers concert due to a lack of press, fans in the Washington, DC area began a newsletter designed to keep one another informed of local events. Dubbed Bluegrass Unlimited, that newsletter survives as a glossy monthly magazine that covers bluegrass around the world. In 1970 a pair of young Chicago blues fans founded Living Blues, a magazine devoted to the African-American vernacular form first recorded at the dawn of the music industry and itself a revival mainstay. Now published by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, Living Blues also carries on, documenting its obsession in loving and extraordinary detail. Also in 1970, three graduate students in the northeast released the first two albums on their new record label, Rounder Records. Not only has Rounder helped traditional music weather its years in the commercial doldrums but, through its extraordinary stylistic eclecticism, its casual mixture of the commercial and the homegrown and its willingness to breach boundaries, it has made its own contribution to the redefinition of folk music.[100]

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[1] Both quotations are from Shelly Romalis, Pistol Packin' Mama: Aunt Molly Jackson And The Politics of Folksong (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 2.

[2] " . . . the living incarnation" is from Richard A. Reuss, "Woody Guthrie and His Folk Tradition," Journal of American Folklore 83 (July-September 1970): 273, 278; on Guthrie generally see Ed Cray, Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) and Joe Klein, Woody Guthrie: A Life (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980).

[3] David Dunaway, How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 64.

[4] Both quotations are from Richard A. Reuss, "American Folksong and Left-Wing Politics: 1935-56," Journal of the Folklore Institute 12 (February-March 1975): 94-96.

[5] Dunaway, How Can I Keep, 144-145.

[6] Ibid., 150-156 and 172-210; David K. Dunaway, "Songs of Subversion: How The FBI Destroyed The Weavers," Village Voice 21 January 1980, 39.

[7] "Folk-Singer Oscar Brand Joins Witch-Hunt Hysteria," Sing Out!, November 1951, 2.

[8] Oscar Brand, interview by author. The dates and other details of all interviews appear in the Note on Citations, which follows the text.

[9] Pete Seeger, "Sea Song Paperback," Sing Out!, Winter 1957, 21.

[10] Dunaway, How Can I Keep, 158

[11] "Folk Singer Opposed," New York Times, 13 April 1956), 51.

[12] "Hearing Set On Singer," New York Times, 12 July 1958), 19; David King Dunaway, "Politics and Music," New York Times, 10 October 1981, 25.

[13] Ronald D. Cohen, Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), Chapter 4 passim.

[14] Feld and Scherman quotes from Tony Scherman, "This man captured the true sounds of the whole world," Smithsonian, August 1987, 110 and 112.

[15] Reissued on CD as American Banjo: Three Finger and Scruggs Style, Smithsonian/ Folkways CD SF 40037; Neil V. Rosenberg, Bluegrass: A History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985; Illini Books edition, 1993), 110-111.

[16] Dave Van Ronk, interview by author.

[17] Greil Marcus, Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1997; reprint New York: Owl Books, 1998), 102.

[18] Kip Lornell, "Dave Van Ronk's Folkway's Years," liner notes to the audio recording Dave Van Ronk, The Folkways Years, 1959-61, Smithsonian/Folkways CD SF 40041.

[19] " . . . stylistic niche" from Jac Holzman and Gavin Daws, Follow the Music: The Life and High Times of Elektra Records in the Great Years of American Pop Culture (Santa

Monica, CA: First Media Books), 9. Remaining quotation and information from Nat Hentoff, "A Record Becomes Elektra: On the Birth of a Label," Rogue, July 1959, 21.

[20] Robert Cantwell, When We Were Good: The Folk Revival (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1-10.

[21] Happy Traum, interview by author.

[22] Traum, interview by author.

[23] Traum, interview by author.

[24] "Like From The Halls Of Ivy," Time, 11 July 1960, 56. Dave Guard quoted in Bruce Pollock's liner notes to the audio recording Troubadours of the Folk Era, Volume 3: The Groups, Rhino CD R2 70264.

[25] Cantwell, When We Were Good, 2; Traum, interview by author; Van Ronk, interview by author.

[26] Neil Rossi, interview by author. Van Ronk, interview by author.

[27] Dave Van Ronk, "Reflections on this Recording," from the liner notes to The Folkways Years, annotation to the song "Spike Driver's Moan."

[28] Gordon Friesen, "The Birth of Broadside," reprinted in Sis Cunningham, Red Dust & Broadsides: A Piece of People's History in Songs, Poems and Prose, ed. Carol Hanisch (Self-published by Sis Cunningham, 1990).

[29] J.C. Barden, "Pete Seeger," High Fidelity, January 1963, 51, 53; "They Hear America Singing," Time 19 July 1963, 53; "Big Folk Singers on Campus," Look, 2 July 1963, 59, 61-62; "The Angry Young Folk Singers," Life 10 April 1964, 109, 114.

[30] Richard Flacks, Making History: The American Left and the American Mind (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 182-184.

[31] Highwaymen ad: Billboard, 28 September 1963, 26; Kingston Trio ad: Billboard, 16 November 1963, 7. Dylan memorandum: reprinted on page 19 of the booklet accompanying the audio recording of Bob Dylan, The Bootleg Series, 1961-1991, Volumes 1-3, Columbia Records (ellipsis in original).

[32] Ron Radosh, "Commercialism and the Folk Song Revival," Sing Out!, Spring 1959, 27.

[33] Stephen Fiott, "In Defense of Commercial Folk Singers," Sing Out!, December-January 1962-63, 43-45.

[34] Irwin Silber, "Folk Music—1963," Sing Out!, October-November 1963, 2-3.

[35] Frank Warner, "Frank Proffitt," Sing Out!, October-November 1963, 6-9. Sandy Paton, "Horton Barker: An Appreciation," Sing Out!, April-May 1963, 5-6.

[36] The Sing Out! circulation figure comes from Cohen, Rainbow Quest, 217. I obtained Time and Newsweek circulation figures from The Standard Periodical Directory, 1964-1965 (New York: Oxbridge Publishing Co., Inc., 1964). Time led the category of newsmagazine, with a circulation of 3,100,000. Newsweek was second, with a circulation of 1,750,000. These were approximate figures, covering the three years before the Directory's publication. The Seeger quote is from Reuss, American Folksongs, 96.

[37] Belafonte: "Wild About Harry," Time, 1 July 1957, 66; Dane: "A Gasser," Time, 24 November 1958, 70; Kingston Trio: "Like From The Halls Of Ivy," Time, 11 July 1960, 56; Flatt: "Pickin' Scruggs," Time, 30 June 1961, 53; Limeliters: "The Faculty," Time, 16 June 1961, 56; Highwaymen: "Reality In Academia," Time, 16 October 1961, 61; Clancys: "Pop Records," Time, 22 December 1961, 40; Baez: "The Folk Girls," Time, 1 June 1962, 39.

[38] "It's Folksy. . . It's Delightful, It's A Craze," Newsweek, 6 June 1960, 112; Bikel: "Doubling His Talent," Newsweek, 24 February 1958, 63; Kingston Trio: "Strange Saga of a Song," Newsweek, 24 November 1958, 70; Clancys: "Just Folks," Newsweek, 1 October 1962, 50; Mitchell Trio: "On The Road," Newsweek, 28 September 1964, 92; PPM: "The Magic Dragon," Newsweek, 8 April 1963, 88.

[39] "Like From . . . ," 56.

[40] Limeliters: "The Faculty," 56; New Lost City Ramblers: "Folk Frenzy," Time, 11 July 1960, 81; St. Marie: "Folk Singers: Solitary Indian," Time, 10 December 1965, 62; Rose: "The Fourth Rose," Time, 29 January 1965, 68; Highwaymen: "Reality in Academia," 61.

[41] "Hoots and Hollers On The Campus," Newsweek, 27 November 1961, 84. Previously Newsweek did report that Seeger had been sentenced to prison for his failure to tell Congress "about Communist affiliations." The article stated that upon his release on bail following sentencing Seeger performed at New York's Town Hall, where he was given a standing ovation when he first appeared on stage. The one-paragraph article contained no discussion of the folk revival as such. "Let Me Sing," Newsweek, 17 April 1961, 60.

[42] Seeger: "Folk Frenzy;" Dane: "A Gasser," 70; Barry Hansen, "Barbara Dane Sings The Blues," Sing Out!, April-May 1964, 19.

[43] Odetta: "Baby in the Cradle," Time, 5 December 1960, 66; Clancys: "Pop Records," Time, 22 December 1961, 40; Newport audience: "The Maid of Constant Sorrow," Time, 7 August 1964, 74.

[44] Flatt and Scruggs: "Pickin' Scruggs;" 53; Ritchie: "The Milk Drinkers," Newsweek, 12 August 1963, 80; Joke: "The Fourth Rose," 68.

[45] Traum, interview by author.

[46] Traum, interview by author.

[47] Traum, interview by author.

[48] Bob Dylan, Chronicles: Volume One (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 71.

[49] Irwin Silber, "An Open Letter To Bob Dylan," Sing Out!, November 1964, 22.

[50] Bob Cohen, letter to the editor, Broadside, 20 January 1965 (unpaginated).

[51] Phil Ochs, "An Open Letter From Phil Ochs To Irwin Silber, Paul Wolfe and Joseph E. Levine." Broadside, 20 January 1965 (unpaginated).

[52] Paul Nelson, "What's Happening." Sing Out!, November 1965, 6-8; reprinted as "Newport Folk Festival, 1965," in Craig McGregor, ed., Bob Dylan, The Early Years: A Retrospective (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990), 73-76.

[53] Hester: "Just Playin' Folks," Saturday Evening Post, 30 May 1964, 25; Cheryl Anne Brauner, A Study of the Newport Folk Festival And The Newport Folk Foundation (Master's Thesis, Dept. of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1983), 248; Collins: Holzman, Follow the Music, 140

[54] Eric Von Schmidt and Jim Rooney, Baby Let Me Follow You Down: The Illustrated Story Of The Cambridge Folk Years, Second Edition (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 302.

[55] Traum, interview by author.

[56] Robert Shelton, "Folk Music Festival," The Nation, 1 August 1959, 59-60.

[57] Seeger quotation in Pete Seeger, "Johnny Appleseed, Jr.," Sing Out!, Feb-March 1963, 76; quoted in Brauner, A Study, 66. For a full discussion of the Newport festival reorganization see Brauner, A Study, 62-83.

[58] "Folk Festivals Are 'In'," Sing Out!, October-November 1963, 24, 26. The same issue, on page 25, includes a "dissent" by reader Jess Cannon. Writing in the form of a "talkin' blues," Cannon bemoaned Newport's cost, its crowds and the inattention of its audience: "The noise around there was pretty loud/But of course you couldn't blame the crowd/Just because their talk was drownin' out/ The music they were talkin' about/After all, if they hadn't been talkin' so loud, they mighta had to listen."

[59] A. Poulin, Jr. and David A. DeTurk, "Introduction: Speculations on the Dimensions of a Renaissance," in De Turk and Poulin, American Folk Scene, 32.

[60] Robert Shelton, "Eighth Folk Fete Opens In Newport," New York Times, 25 July 1968, sec. 1, p. 29.

[61] Ellen Willis, "Newport: You Can't Go Down Home Again," New Yorker, 17 August 1968, 86, 88.

[62] Robert Shelton, "5-Day Folk Fete Attracts 70,000," New York Times, 29 July 1968, sec. 1, p. 26; Willis, "Newport," 86, 88, 90.

[63] Robert Shelton, "Workshops At Newport Give Listeners A Chance," New York Times, 27 July 1968, sec. 1, p. 15.

[64] Willis, "Newport," 86.

[65] John S. Wilson, "Folk Fete Shines Without Superstars," New York Times, 22 July 1969, sec. 1, p. 32.

[66] Brauner, A Study, 155.

[67] Wilson, "Folk Fete Shines."

[68] Israel Young's unpublished "Notebooks," from a section entitled "Newport Folk Festival 1969." Copy in author's possession, provided by Young.

[69] Barry Olivier, "The Growth Of The Berkeley Folk Festival," unpublished essay in the possession of the author, 23 (emphasis in original).

[70] Ibid., 24, 26-27 (emphasis in original), 31.

[71] Ibid., 35, 37.

[72] Barry Oliver, interview by author.

[73] Barry Olivier, "Some Personal Thoughts," unpublished essay in the possession of the author, 41-42.

[74] Ted Drozdowski, "Folk Explosion," Boston Phoenix, 12 July 2001, online edition at <http://www.bostonphoenix.com> by searching the Archives for the article title and date (accessed 23 February 2005).

[75] Von Schmidt, 136, 168.

[76] Ibid., 232-234.

[77] Ibid., 301-302.

[78] Ibid., 304.

[79] Happy Traum, "The Swan Song of Folk Music," Rolling Stone, 17 May 1969, Insert, p. 7-8.

[80] Ibid., 8.

[81] Neil Rossi, interview by author.

[82] David S. Rotenstein, "A History of the Philadelphia Folksong Society and Academic Folklore in Philadelphia Pennsylvania," Philadelphia Inquirer, 23 August 1992, online edition at <http://davidsr01.home.mindspring.com/html/folksong1.htm> (accessed 24 February 2005).

[83] Julie McCullough, "FSGW History" (copyright Julie McCullough 1999), at <http://www.fsgw.org/history.htm> (accessed 24 February 2005). The examples of society activities are from Folklore Society of Greater Washington Newsletter (Dec. 1999), 4-6. The biographical information on Seamus Ennis is from Kristen Baggelaar and Donald Milton, Folk Music: More Than A Song (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1979), 121.

[84] Willie-O, "Lyr Req: Beers Family Song Lyric," Mudcat Cafe, 10 December 2000, <http://www.mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=28300#354428> (accessed 24 February 2005).

[85] "What's Happening/Festivals/Fox Hollow," Sing Out!, Oct.-Nov. 1967, 2; Marlene and Dick Levine, interview by author.

[86] Larry Kelp, "Just Folk," East Bay Express, 18 June 1993, 1. For further information on the Freight and Salvage see Philip Elwood, "25 Years of Roots and Hoots," San Francisco Examiner, 4 June 1993, D-17; Sam McManis, "Just Plain Folk," San Francisco

Chronicle, 23 February 2001, online edition at <http://sfgate.com/cgi bin /article. cgi?file=/ chronicle/ archive/2001/02/23/EB56896.DTL> (accessed 24 February 2005); Derk Richardson, "Half A Century High," San Francisco Bay Guardian, 9 June 1993.

[87] Kelp, "Just Folk."

[88] Andrew C. Revkin, "A Village Pied Piper For the Spirit of Folk," New York Times, national ed., 4 January 1999, B1, B5.

[89] Jack Hardy, liner notes to the audio recording Fast Folk: A Community of Singers and Songwriters, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, SFW CD 40135.

[90] Neil Coppage, "Cornelia Street Songwriters Exchange: Does the Folkie Revival Start Here," Stereo Review, December 1980, 85, 86 (emphasis in original).

[91] Rod MacDonald, "Hear Ye! Hear Ye! NYC: The Musician's Cooperative," Sing Out!, July-August-September 1983, 24, 28.

[92] Revkin, "A Village Pied Piper."

[93] MacDonald, "Hear Ye!"

[94] From 1982 through the suspension of publication in 1997, Fast Folk released 105 issues, each consisting of a magazine and album. In 1999 the Smithsonian Institution acquired the entire series, along with the cooperative's archives. Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings sells made-to-order CDs of any given Fast Folk recording and has also released the audio anthology referenced in note 89, above. See Jeff Place, "The Songs, the Writers and the Performers," in the liner notes to this CD.

[95] Clark Weissman, interview by author. Information concerning the Ash Grove opening comes from Ronald D. Cohen, "California and the Folk Music Revival, 1950-1970," 4 (unpublished paper in the possession of the author).

[96] Clark Weissman, interview by author.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Spottswood, Dick, "A 25th Anniversary Retrospect," Bluegrass Unlimited, July 1991, 22; Evan Hatch, "Living Blues: Ever Living, Ever Growing," Southern Register: The Newsletter of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, Fall 2000, 1, 3.

4

FROM CLUB 47 TO UNION GROVE
The Birth Of Rounder Records

> If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.—Ernest Hemingway, to a friend, 1950[1]

On February 23, 1983, members of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences gathered in Los Angeles for the 25th Annual Grammy Awards, the record industry's yearly festival of self-promotion and mutual congratulations. That year the proceedings highlighted Toto, a pop/rock band comprised of one-time Los Angeles studio musicians then enjoying tremendous commercial success. The band's middle-of-the–road sound is well-exemplified by "Rosanna," its multi-million selling paean to actress Rosanna Arquette that is etched permanently into the neurons of anyone who listened to commercial radio in 1982. As Toto reaped acclaim for Record of the Year, Album of the Year and, collectively, Producer of the Year, few gave more than passing notice to the brand new category of Best Traditional Blues Album, won by Alright Again!, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown's maiden Rounder Records' release.[2] Rounder, a 12-year-old company based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, had never before won a Grammy and the album—a horn-laden, big band amalgam of electric blues and jazz—was far removed from most of its other fare. Midwived by the great boom, the label had historically emphasized the rural, acoustic sounds that dominated the more traditional side of that era. Its catalog was replete with old-time fiddling, acoustic blues, bluegrass and accordion-based Cajun tunes. By 1982 it had ventured somewhat beyond that early defining sound, most successfully with the young white blues-rocker George Thorogood. Still, even when

it journeyed from recognizably rural fare, it continued to favor a raw, underproduced, relatively homemade approach, one that Thorogood transferred figuratively from the back porch to the suburban garage.

Alright Again! was, at the time, an anomaly in the Rounder catalog. Producer Scott Billington, employed by Rounder in various capacities since 1976 and now in charge of his first studio session, set out to capture the sound of a particular slice of urban nightlife, utilizing styles and instrumentation far removed from the usual folk revival fare. He sought, unabashedly, a product that was simultaneously commercial and artistic and saw no conflict between the two. For this project, he disdained the revivalist's oft-stated desire to do nothing more than capture the sound of a performance unadorned. Billington's goal was, as he puts it, to make a "record," not a "document." With this in mind he utilized all the professional tools at his disposal. He sought hook-laden songs, helped Brown assemble an experienced studio band and led structured rehearsals in which the rhythm section perfected its parts in one room, while the horns practiced in another. All of this was an "alien concept" for Rounder and Billington sensed some intra-company grumbling that his work was getting "too slick" for the label.[3] "The idea of a producer," he writes, referring to a professional who helps a musician craft a recorded sound, "may have been an uncomfortable concept for some at Rounder, given the idea that the visions of musicians should not be manipulated." Ultimately the label accepted Billington's "aesthetic concept," after "some consideration and a small amount of adjustment."[4]

The resulting album sounded nothing like anything you would hear on a rural southern homestead. Instead, it echoed the sound of Los Angeles's Central Avenue, circa

1945, a place where Brown had performed and cut his first records. In the early forties clubs mushroomed along the avenue, as tens of thousands of blacks fled rural poverty to find work in wartime industry on the west coast, providing eager audiences for ambitious entertainers and entrepreneurs. Central Avenue was, in the words of Mark Humphrey, "nearer to the fabled Hollywood and Pacific beaches than it was to sharecropper farms or cold northern tenements, so blues musicians freely broadened their palettes, painting at times in dreamy hues and often with jazzy sophistication. Bebop no less than blues could be heard on Central in the 1940s, and the close proximity produced some exciting hybrids." [5] This mix was the organic response of a dispossessed racial group searching for companionship and common ground in a new environment, one that strained historic family ties. As such, it should have obvious intellectual appeal to those who appreciate indigenous art developed to serve the needs of community. Yet it was not—and to some degree still is not—viewed as a "folk form," given the deep-seated revivalist prejudice favoring music that is acoustic, homemade in sound and rural in origin. Still, some internal skepticism notwithstanding, Rounder embraced it and this acceptance of a wide variety of vernacular forms has become a company hallmark.

While Alright Again! differs from prior Rounder releases, its creator, Gatemouth Brown, could serve as the quintessential Rounder artist. Born in 1924 in Louisiana and raised in nearby southeast Texas, the African-American Brown grew up hearing his father, a railroad worker, perform a wide variety of styles on numerous instruments. "My daddy was a very great man . . . and he played music at house parties on Saturday nights. He played fiddle, guitar, banjo, mandolin, accordion, everything—played nothin' but country, bluegrass, and Cajun music."[6] Brown set out early to become a professional

musician. By the 1940s he was recording for Aladdin Records in Los Angeles and Houston's Peacock label, each of which fostered the then modern and decidedly urban blues/jazz hybrid dominated by horns and electric guitar. Due to his race and the sound of his earliest recordings, casual commentators generally characterize Brown as a bluesman, though he resents all labels with missionary fervor. One reviewer has pegged the multi-instrumentalist's act as "a diverse casserole of styles."[7] "Look here," says Brown, who is deeply respectful of his father's multi-faceted musical interests and skills, "I refuse to be labeled as a blues player, jazz player, country player, bluegrass player, Cajun player, zydeco player, calypso player—I'm an American musician, and I'm going further than that. I play polkas—that's not American, that's German, and I laid that on them in Berlin."[8]

In many ways, Brown, who is still active more than two decades after his Grammy win, is the epitome of the modern vernacular musician—a commercially savvy performer who roots his art in his own family traditions, which in turn encompass the separate traditions of multiple, overlapping groups in an increasingly hybridized world. By these terms, Rounder is the epitome of the modern vernacular record label. Its vast catalog reveals a deep reverence for music rooted in ethnic and geographic tradition, along with a recognition that tradition is a complex construct, which encompasses the constant change wrought by mobility, education and the ubiquity of the mass media. Begun in 1970 as an "anti-profit collective" by three left-leaning graduate students who romanticized the folk, Rounder has grown into one of the largest and most successful independent labels—probably the largest in the field of tradition-oriented "roots music." To the extent that it has a brand identity among the public-at-large it is as a folk label;

indeed, the New York Times has called it "folk music's big small label."[9] Those who pay closer attention may see Rounder, accurately, as a leader in the field of bluegrass. In addition to reissuing classic material by stylistic progenitors Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs, the label has been home to most of the influential bluegrass performers of the late-twentieth century, encompassing those who emulate the more traditional sound developed in Monroe's band and the jazzier, more experimental hybrids exemplified by banjoists Tony Trischka and his onetime student Bela Fleck.

Bluegrass and blues, however, are only small parts of the story. Among other things, Rounder has released or distributed jazz and Cajun music, anthologies of union songs, music from Mexico, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, and several hundred reggae albums. Historically, most Rounder albums—even those as carefully constructed as Gatemouth Brown's Grammy winner—remain distant from the commercial mainstream. This has changed somewhat in recent years, but however virtuosic or polished some records may be, many remain rooted in specific ethnic, racial or geographic communities. Rounder implicitly presents this "community music" as a genre of its own, one that transcends specific stylistic differences among musical forms. While ardent bluegrassers, to take just one example, sometimes argue that their art is an historic part of the country music industry, Rounder situates it somewhat differently. Viewed as a whole, the company's thick master catalog displays bluegrass as an intrinsic part of the broader world of non-mainstream vernacular music. In Rounder's universe, bluegrass has far more in common with delta blues, Mexican conjuntos and African tribal sounds, than it does with Nashville's latest hat act or femme fatale.

Even before its founders aged, married, bought homes and had children, corporate growth saw the end of Rounder's overt revolutionary stance, as well as the release of more contemporary pop than ever before. These things, along with intermittent labor struggles and an increasingly hierarchical structure, have fostered sometimes vitriolic complaints that Rounder has "gone corporate."[10] Beyond any doubt, the label is today vastly different from the self-styled anti-profit collective of its youth. That may be due in whole or in part to political moderation, to reasoned pragmatism or even to a desire to make money. It may also reflect a desire to serve the real needs of performers who want their records marketed and sold in a manner that affords them the best opportunity to reap the material benefits their society offers. Certainly, much of the company's catalog consists of records that seek merely, in Billington's words, to "document" a particular style. But the bulk of the collection features working musicians who hope that their efforts will earn them both money and recognition. Rounder has shown that the music of sometimes idiosyncratic vernacular artists can be as professionally recorded and as solidly entertaining as that of any mainstream major-label hitmaker. In doing so, they have joined the eternal debate surrounding the juxtaposition of folk culture and commerce, a debate that has energized, or plagued, folk music activism for decades. Supporters believe that the label has dignified and empowered its artists and the cultures from which they spring. Critics might see it as one more cultural colonizer—a profit-monger that dilutes and thus degrades valuable aspects of heritage. Viewed through the lens of this ongoing discussion, Rounder presents a modern case study in the processes and pitfalls of three decades spent marketing tradition.

Of the three individuals known colloquially as the "Rounder Founders," Ken Irwin, Bill Nowlin and Marian Leighton, only Irwin had a childhood that touched even remotely upon the possibility of a life immersed "in traditional folk music and its contemporary offshoots."[11] He was born in New York City in 1944 and, with his parents and older brother, moved north to suburban Westchester County at age four. Though not particularly active politically during Irwin's childhood, his parents possessed both leftist and intellectual leanings, those two staples of post-war urban revivalism. By the time of Irwin's adolescence, this leftism extended only far enough to make them ardent Adlai Stevenson supporters. Still, the political views of his father Theodore were sufficiently pronounced that Ken once asked if he had been a member of the Communist Party, which his father denied. Nonetheless, young Ken's earliest "political" memory is of sitting by the radio in 1953 awaiting confirmation that Joseph Stalin had died. Theodore was a freelance journalist and one-time editor at Look magazine, who changed his surname from Isaacs in an effort to avoid career limitations imposed by anti-Semitism. Over a long career he published many articles in popular magazines, as well as several books ranging from detective fiction to practical health guides.[12]

By the 1950s Theodore may have been little more than a strong devotee of the Democratic Party but his 1935 novel Strange Passage was a highly politicized attack on capitalism in general and American xenophobia in particular. Set in the 1920s and early 1930s, the book follows a group of illegal immigrants facing deportation during a time of high U.S. antagonism toward all things foreign. It begins on a train run by the U.S. immigration authorities—dubbed a "Deportation Special"—that is taking a diverse group to Ellis Island, from where they will be shipped involuntarily back to their homelands. In

an early passage Irwin sums up what he sees as American distaste toward foreigners from all lands:

> . . . at other key cities over the long journey, aliens were being swallowed up; the Deportation Special was gorging itself. To the exit gate of the nation, and the train would spew what it had swallowed along the way. Then, out with you, go back where you came from, you dago, you hunky, you scoovy, you heine, you mick, you sheenie, you limey. Get out and stay out![13]

Throughout, Irwin's disdain for parochialism and bigotry is clear. He expresses his own cultural relativism succinctly in a scene set at a world's fair-like exhibition, where his characters come upon an array of dried vegetables and "peasant pottery" used to decorate a simulated rural Italian household:

> 'Crazy, ain't it?' tittered Rosie.
> 'It's the way country people live in Italy,' Catherine defended. 'It's not crazy, is it, Mrs. Chapin?'
> Stephanie was grave. 'Of course not. In each country people have their own way of doing things. It's just different from ours, that's all.'[14]

Irwin frames his detailed exploration of narrow-minded hatred with a discussion of an American economic system that he clearly considers an immoral failure. As presented by one aggrieved deportee, its varied ills include "Exploitation. Opportunism. A planless social and economic system which has been proved unworkable. Organized cupidity. Speculative financial pirates. Inequitable distribution of social income." As the book ends, its protagonist, facing a forced return to Austria to confront a politically motivated murder charge, is given the opportunity to journey to Russia, instead, where the state promises to subsidize his innovations in industrial design. He convinces his beloved to join him by extolling the virtues of Soviet Russia as "A place to take root.

Where there is work for everyone, foreigner as well as native-born. A chance for us. Where art is fostered for what it brings to the people—not for its cash value to exploiters. A vital purpose for my work. A new Promised Land."[15]

Marred at times by somewhat artless didacticism, Strange Passage is very much a product of the radical literary tradition of its day, when working people were victims of a seemingly endless depression and for many intellectuals the Soviet experiment held out the romantic possibility of a better world. By the time Ken was growing up, Theodore may have moderated his political philosophy but his core values never changed. His novel's themes of cultural pluralism, economic justice, anti-authoritarianism and the value of artistic expression found renewed voice in his son's effort to give disparate cultures pride of place in the realms of both art and commerce. To the considerable extent that the younger Irwin's own efforts are fueled by fervid romanticism, that too appears an inheritance from his father.

Rita Irwin, Ken's mother, also served as a source of progressive political and social values. Her response to the drive for nuclear shelters that gripped the country in the fifties and early sixties was to obtain a rubber stamp or stickers containing the adage "Peace Is The Only Shelter," which she affixed to all of the family mail.[16] While primarily a homemaker during her son's youth, Rita had previously been a social worker and author. In the 1930s she co-authored a book entitled Practical Birth Control at a time when such a project was still somewhat of an avant-garde, politicized endeavor. In doing so, she cast her lot with a crusade that, in the words of historian Christine Stansell, had previously given "political shape and purpose to a sexual revolution" and was thus "critical to feminist modernity."[17] Rita Irwin advocated birth control for any reason that a

couple deemed appropriate. This might include a woman's desire to enjoy sexual relations despite the need for continued employment, or it might stem from nothing more than a couple's conclusion that they are unready for parenthood though still desirous of "a rich and harmonious sex experience . . ." In terms guaranteed to alarm old fashioned moralists, she attacked the Catholic Church's contention that the so-called "rhythm method" of contraception is a "natural" one. If the Church believes in the desirability of 'natural' methods," she wrote, "does it realize that making love by the calendar is an interference with the natural desire for sex relationship, which is not limited to special days?"[18] Demonstrating a deep understanding of the pervasiveness of politics in everyday life, Irwin's ostensibly "practical" manual confronted issues related to gender roles, economic class and the civic function of organized religion.

Theodore and Rita's record collection leaned heavily toward Broadway favorites. The first records Ken recalls hearing were the soundtracks to Carousel, South Pacific, Annie Get Your Gun and Oklahoma. He discovered rock and roll through radio in junior high and experienced his first musical epiphany when a friend introduced him to Alan Freed's radio show, then broadcast throughout the New York metropolitan area. An exponent of black rhythm and blues, Freed promoted it aggressively to white audiences, not only on radio but also through movies, television and concert production. Riding the soundwave produced by countless doo-wop acts and such transitional pioneers as Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry, he helped build the incipient rock and roll industry. Irwin loved the black acts and though he insists he was initially ignorant of their race, he soon learned they were the source of many tunes that he knew only through cover versions by white artists. Invariably, he recalls, he preferred the black versions, citing Pat Boone's

renditions of "Blueberry Hill" and "Tutti Frutti" as plainly inferior to the originals performed, respectively, by Fats Domino and Little Richard. He listened to Freed as often as he could.[19]

Though he characterizes this early musical interest as a purely "social thing," it did, at least in one instance, prompt the same tenacious activism he ultimately exhibited in building his record label. He lobbied his father successfully to pitch a feature story on Freed to a magazine editor. Theodore secured the assignment and in the course of his research he took young Ken to Freed's Connecticut home. The legendary disc jockey gave the future label owner a cache of records and offered him backstage access to one of the rock and roll package shows he produced. Theodore's leftist politics did not preclude a father's innate conservatism where his son's safety was concerned. Alarmed by reports of "riots" at Freed's shows, he withheld permission. Years later, Ken Irwin bemoaned the opportunity forever lost, seeing this incident as "one of the two or three things that I look back on and say, 'Ahhh. You know, how could he?' To see Chuck Berry and Little Richard and all those people in their prime [when] they were tremendously energetic and exciting and the crowds were going bananas."[20]

Irwin immersed himself in activities in his tiny suburban high school. Though small in stature, he played on the varsity basketball team. Prime seats at New York Knicks' games, a benefit of his father's friendship with sportswriters, helped secure his lifelong devotion to the game. He briefly warmed the bench on the varsity baseball team and strived to perfect his dancing skills through formal classes, a devotion to Dick Clark's American Bandstand and hours of solitary practice with a doorknob as his

partner. He even tried his hand at singing, joining schoolmates in a short-lived vocal group called Goldilocks and the Three Bears.[21]

Despite his parents' strong beliefs, Irwin describes himself as an apolitical high schooler in what he perceived as "a fairly apolitical time." In his senior year, however, Pete Seeger stirred some latent political consciousness, albeit in a fairly minor way. Irwin attended a Seeger concert at a neighboring school and enjoyed it enough to start listening to a friend's Seeger LPs. He took a special fancy to a live cross-racial anthology that included Seeger and Chicago bluesmen Memphis Slim and Willie Dixon. He was struck particularly by an Ernie Marrs composition entitled "The Quizmasters," which addressed the cheating scandals that had rocked popular television quiz shows prompting congressional investigations and criminal prosecutions.[22] The song cut to the corporate greed at the scandal's heart, arguing that even those contestants who cheated knowingly were mere pawns of avaricious advertisers and networks. It was an auspicious fascination for the future anti-profit collectivist.

Following this baptism, Irwin began delving into some of the disparate corners of the world of commercial folk and topical music, enjoying the polished vocals of the Chad Mitchell Trio, the social satire of Tom Lehrer and a Folkways LP entitled We Shall Overcome: Songs of the Freedom Riders and Sit-Ins. Trading a collection of Mad magazines for some old 45 and 78 rpm records gave him his first unintended exposure to bluegrass, which he considered "hysterical . . . really laughable stuff." Yet, family friends, knowing that Irwin liked folk music of some sort, decided that he needed at least one full-length bluegrass album in his collection. As a high school graduation gift they gave him the self-titled debut album by The Greenbriar Boys, a group of young, New

York-based revivalists who were veterans of the Sunday afternoon folk singing gatherings in Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park, a scene of which Irwin was then completely ignorant. Despite their northern and urban upbringing, The Greenbriar Boys had found some success within their idiom's southern base. They were the first band from the north to appear, in 1958, on the stage of the Old Time Fiddlers Convention in Union Grove, North Carolina, an annual event since 1924, and one that was later to mean a great deal to Irwin. In 1960 they won first place in the Convention's old-time band contest. The significance of the Greenbriar's boundary crossing escaped Irwin entirely and he hated their album. The "high nasal voices," he says, "were just not to my liking. Couldn't deal with it. Again, very laughable." His tastes soon broadened dramatically as he left home in the fall of 1962 to enter Tufts University in Massachusetts. The folk music boom was nearing a peak of commercial activity and the nearby Boston/Cambridge area rivaled New York as a revivalist hub. With his relatively small folk album collection in hand, Irwin headed into this maelstrom to begin college life with Bill Nowlin, the stranger that Tufts had selected as his dormitory roommate. [23]

Nowlin, the oldest of three children, was born in 1945, the son of an electronics salesman and a homemaker. He lived first in the town of Jamaica Plain on the outskirts of Boston and moved to nearby Lexington while in the first grade. He was a good student who always knew he was headed for college. At an early age he developed his lifelong love of baseball in general and the Boston Red Sox in particular. Using a system of self-made stencils he produced a neighborhood newsletter with a sports page that compiled statistics drawn from local sandlot baseball games. He drew comics with war and space themes and humorous comics that he modeled on Mad magazine. He also displayed a

penchant for organization that—with the benefit of considerable hindsight—he believes foreshadowed his interest in Rounder's business affairs. "I used to like to count things and make lists of things," he explains. "I would just for some reason write down things like the longest rivers in the world and make a list of the top ten. Just copying them out of a book really. There was no point to it. But I think that had something to do with some kind of business aptitude later in terms of structure and organization." He was also a fledgling antiquarian of sorts. "I liked old books and magazines. I used to go downtown before government center was there. It was a very interesting part of town," he recalls. "I used to buy old comic books for three cents each and old books for a quarter, that type of thing. There were a lot of tattoo parlors and burlesque houses there at the time but that has all been renovated out to make a relatively boring place. It was kind of exciting as a kid."[24]

His family casually enjoyed music but nothing suggested it would become a career path. His mother and younger sisters all sang in a church choir. Young Bill took piano and trumpet lessons briefly but did not stick with either. Though he enjoyed listening to music, it was hardly the passion that baseball was and his record collection was not as esoteric as Irwin's. The first record he owned was "In The Middle Of The House" sung by Rusty Draper, a bland country/pop crooner who had a number of hits in the fifties. The second was "Hound Dog" backed with "Don't Be Cruel," Elvis Presley's 1956 smash, recorded after he moved from the independent Sun Records to RCA and was on his way to becoming a phenomenon.[25] Nowlin's first album was <u>What'd I Say</u> by Ray Charles, a 1959 collection of singles on Atlantic Records. He also enjoyed Chuck Berry, Little Richard and "quite a few one-hit-wonders." He explored the burgeoning folk

revival a bit but, unlike Irwin with his collection of freedom songs, Nowlin ventured no further than its most commercial sounds. He recalls owning some Kingston Trio records and his younger sisters owned at least one album by Peter, Paul and Mary.[26]

The adolescent Nowlin flowered in the field of politics. His household was less political than Irwin's but young Bill developed a precocious political awareness nonetheless. Throughout his childhood his parents were passive Republican voters. One of Nowlin's earliest political memories is of watching the 1952 Republican Party convention on television, a somewhat different awakening than Irwin's Stalin deathwatch of one year later. The convention pageantry drew Nowlin in and he decided, "What I really wanted to do when I grew up was go to these big conventions and wear buttons and have confetti and balloons come down and carry the sign that said Massachusetts, or something like that." His fascination with political theatre took a stranger turn when the American Nazi Party staged a rally in downtown Boston. Young Bill went to observe the excitement, drawn by the show, not the message. An interest in political issues developed. "I remember listening to talk radio about when I was twelve and hearing people like Malcolm X . . . and getting interested in politics so to speak, in the way of political issues and that's why I ended up majoring in politics, partly." He volunteered in local campaigns, where his enthusiasm served him well. "Even when I was sixteen, I had my own desk, my own office, and my own expense account on one of them, for the U.S. Senate. I guess they were hard up for people, maybe, but I remember going out and having a steak lunch and charging it."[27]

In the summer of 1962, after learning of their assignment as roommates, the two arranged to meet before the school year began. Beginning the friendship with a self-

serving practical joke, Irwin attended in the company of a friend who pretended that he was Ken. He reasoned that if he did not like Nowlin he could change the roommate assignment before school began and successfully conceal his true identity once on campus. Perhaps because of the plan's fundamental silliness, Irwin abandoned it after the meeting began. Still, the two were initially wary of one another. Early on, Nowlin attempted his own practical joke, this time in a spirit of greater friendliness. He emptied a large quantity of small cereal boxes that he had removed from the dormitory dining hall and managed to prop them above the entrance to their room, so they would tumble down upon Irwin as he opened the door. Nowlin hid in the closet to observe. Irwin took the prank in good spirits and, 40 years later, each recalls the incident as a positive moment, one that broke the tension between two kids away from home for the first time.[28] While each had developed conscious politics before leaving high school, they had diametrically opposed ideologies. Irwin, though nowhere near the activist that Nowlin was, followed his parents' leftist leanings into an appreciation of Pete Seeger and Folkways Records. Nowlin, to the contrary, became a self-styled conservative Republican who entered Tufts as an advocate of the incipient presidential campaign of the right-wing's favorite, Barry Goldwater. Their divergent ideologies could easily have driven them apart. Instead, unpredictably, they found common ground in the arts.

Early on, they began a mutual exploration of the Boston arts scene. Due to his parents' interest in the stage, Irwin was somewhat of a veteran theater-goer and had attended New York productions of Once Upon A Mattress with the then unknown Carol Burnett, The Fantastiks and How to Succeed In Business Without Really Trying, among others. Responding to a solicitation, he became a campus representative for the Charles

Playhouse, which entailed posting promotional fliers around Tufts in return for free tickets to any show that was not sold out. He soon enlisted Nowlin's assistance and the pair expanded these efforts to other theaters. Wanting to broaden the scope of their representation even further, they contacted Manny Greenhill, a leading promoter of folk music concerts in Boston and the booking agent for Joan Baez and other luminaries. Greenhill "retained" them as representatives, thus providing them with free access to concerts as well as the theatre. They soon began performing this service both for other concert promoters and for local coffeehouses. Enterprising and eclectic, they also posted fliers on behalf of evangelical "Bishop" Homer Tomlinson, the 1964 presidential candidate of the Theocratic Party who, two years later, was to bypass the political process and declare himself "king of the world."[29]

Their bond sealed around music, a somewhat unpredictable occurrence since the politically conservative Nowlin hated Irwin's Pete Seeger records. Still, they were young, away from home and music was a strong social lubricant. Irwin owned one of their dormitory's few stereos and it, along with their fairly small record collections, became a focal point. The Greenbriar Boys LP started getting a lot of play. They initially treated the record as one more joke, singing its tunes out loud to deliberately annoy their friends. It grew on them gradually—as Nowlin put it he "learned to like it." Later in their freshman year those selfsame Greenbriar Boys appeared in concert nearby, sharing a bill with Ramblin' Jack Elliott and Erik Von Schmidt, two other now legendary folk revival figures. The concert was a mini-festival of interpretive revivalism, consisting of acts that fell in between the rural source singers who were then beginning to enjoy some revival fame and the commercial stylings of the pop/folk groups. It proved to be perfect

introductory fare. The Greenbriars represented all the city kids then finding freshness and purity in bluegrass. Elliott channeled the spirit and style of that already iconic outsider and rebel, Woody Guthrie. Von Schmidt, a young white man, sang the blues in a roar that grasped at some unimaginable pain. Irwin loved the performance. Nowlin came along more slowly.[30]

Ultimately, the two became fans of Hillbilly at Harvard, a college radio program that broadcast bluegrass and early country music every Saturday. Begun in 1948 and still airing, it was the only Harvard radio show that had a noticeable impact on the surrounding community. As Boston's only major country radio outlet, it routinely received listener calls from working class suburbs far removed from the intellectual climate of Harvard Yard.[31] It was at Club 47, however, that the roommates succumbed to what became the religion of folk music. "They'd have traditional music all the time," enthused Irwin. "They'd have Doc Watson coming in with Clarence Ashley and they'd have Muddy Waters and just about everybody that you could imagine. It was really, really incredible; a wonderful, wonderful place." Despite their devotion to the club, they were not part of the inner circle and Nowlin recalls a distinct cliquishness that he found hard to penetrate. [32] Though the long lines of fans waiting for admittance contributed to the sense of separation between insider and outsider, they also exposed the duo to the expertise that resided within the audience, a group that, for the few hours before show-times, formed its own floating community. Nowlin recalls:

> I can often remember just standing in line talking to really knowledgeable people. . . And people were very into records . . . we'd be standing in line to see somebody and people could say something like, 'Wow, that third track on side B. Isn't that great?'

> And everybody else would say 'Yeah, Yeah, I really love the way they do that.' Cause people really knew.[33]

They embraced it all fairly rapidly. They would often go to Club 47 even when they were unfamiliar with the featured performer, willing to trust the club and try anything. They saw Odetta in a concert that Greenhill promoted, for which they had posted fliers. She was then a staple of the professional folk circuit, whose sometimes studied presentation of blues and spirituals conveyed her classical and theatrical training. Nowlin was uncertain that he liked her but "thought" that perhaps he should. Irwin was more of a fan. Seeking an autograph to give to his girlfriend, he presented the singer with a promotional flier that she inscribed "Go well, stay well, Odetta." It did not take long before they recognized a difference between urban revivalists and the more "authentic" sources, drawn straight from the idealized folk. They read album liner notes and saw, for example, that Ralph Rinzler of the Greenbriar Boys went to Swarthmore and seemed much like them. Seeking worlds unlike his own, Nowlin developed a real "romanticization about hillbilly music," a genre that he believed represented "real folk musicians sitting on the back porch playing the banjo."[34]

It was a "big deal" when a genuine rural singer came to town—a Clarence Ashley, Dock Boggs or Roscoe Holcomb. "They had an artistry to them," Nowlin says. What seems to have mattered more than musical artistry, per se, was the vast distance between the life experiences of this youthful resident of greater Boston and those of the rural performers whom he admired and idealized. Whether from Appalachia or the Mississippi Delta, the "genuine" folk singers lionized by Nowlin and Irwin, and by the revival as a whole, appeared as representatives of a foreign culture.

> We were definitely white middle class kids, but we were more intrigued by people who came from really different backgrounds, [such as] Appalachian banjo players that played on their back porch and didn't have any electricity and had to stop playing or put the candle on, or whatever. That type of thing. Maybe it was more interesting because it was a little exotic to some extent because it was different from the background we had. It also seemed purer in some ways . . . coming from people who only learned from oral tradition, as opposed to the way that we learned from records and radio and so forth, and we knew that there weren't that many people like that going to be around too much longer.[35]

Their passion led them down roads both creative and amusing. When Clarence Ashley came to town to perform at Club 47, they devised their own path to involvement, despite the lack of any formal connection to the club. Recalling one of his childhood interests, Nowlin used a kit to create rubber stamps containing the image of an arrow and the words "Clarence Ashley Is Coming." The two stamped that phrase everywhere they went in the days before the concert and imprinted it on small cards that they handed to strangers. It was, Nowlin says, more akin to a "guerilla art project" than a promotional effort. Not only was no promotion needed, because the Club's partisans guaranteed a sell out, but the stamp contained absolutely no information useful to the uninitiated—neither an explanation of who Ashley was nor details of the performance. The entire exercise was nothing more than an outlet for their exuberant devotion to the rural, old-time music and romanticized lifestyle that Ashley represented.[36]

This sense of romance was an almost inevitable byproduct of the rarefied confines of revival outposts such as Club 47. There, in the company of others utterly unfamiliar with rural working class life, fans educated by Sing Out! stood in collective awe of these musical icons, presented as avatars of a purer, less corrupt world. To even attempt to pierce this veil one needed to journey beyond the safe confines of Harvard Square. For

those willing, life in greater-Boston afforded at least one opportunity to experience a southern, tradition-based musical form in a live setting removed from the amber glow of revival preciousness. This opportunity came in the persons of The Lilly Brothers. Mitchell Lilly, known as "Bea," and his younger brother Everett were born into a musical West Virginia family in 1921 and 1923 respectively. The Lillys began performing professionally as young boys, singing old time mountain songs on southern radio. Together they joined various bands and toured the south, sharing stages with Bill Monroe and other country music pioneers. In 1951 Everett joined Flatt and Scruggs on mandolin, while Bea settled back down in West Virginia. Earning a living on the road was hard work and Everett tired of the pace in less than two years. Tex Logan, a fiddler and friend, was now a graduate student in the MIT electrical engineering program. He invited Everett and Bea to form a band with him in Boston. Everett agreed, upon being assured that Logan could secure a single stable gig. With banjoist Don Stover, a friend from West Virginia then working as a coal miner, the brothers relocated to Boston in late 1952.[37]

After a brief run at a fairly upscale lounge, the band began a six-night-per-week gig at the Hillbilly Ranch, a bar that can best be described by an elemental, easily understood term. It was, by every account extant, a dump. Located off an alley adjacent to the Trailways Bus Depot, the Ranch was a seedy bar in a seedy part of town. It featured steer horns on its exterior sign, scenes of mountain cabins on the interior walls and a dance floor set off by fence posts. This décor stemmed from neither romance nor intellectualized irony. It was nothing more than a reflection of what the place was—a country music honky-tonk that served uniformed sailors on leave, shore patrol personnel and working class locals. Many were themselves displaced southerners and most liked to

unwind to hard liquor and cigarettes with their music. The Lilly Brothers played mountain songs and bluegrass at the Hillbilly Ranch from 1953 until the late 1960s, and their presence inverts the oft-held assumption that urban folk revivalists were solely responsible for the movement of bluegrass from south to north. While revivalists played a tremendous role in that process and in the overall commercial rejuvenation of bluegrass, the Lillys demonstrate that at least some of that transmission stems from natural migration and the innate ability of good bluegrass to find an audience.

Amidst the hard-drinking, largely working-class crowd at the Hillbilly Ranch, Irwin and Nowlin got a taste of early country music as it might have been performed in the roadhouses where it arose, unfiltered by interpreters, whether starry-eyed romantics, sober academics or some hybrid of the two. Fred Pement, who discovered the Lillys while a college student in the early fifties, recalls the Ranch as "no place for a callow youth studying chemical engineering." Nonetheless, he did venture through its doors on more than one occasion, always alone because "I could never get anyone to go with me."[38] Irwin began attending with Nowlin roughly a decade later. He recalls unconfirmed stories of “frequent knife fights [and] occasional shootings." It was "a pretty rough and rowdy place. But the Lilly Brothers played there," he adds, "and we just loved the Lillys. They were originally from West Virginia and they were real, real country, almost beyond description. But they were wonderful singers.”[39] Irwin’s recollection—tinged as it is with the ever-present possibility of flying bullets—may be touched by a romanticism of its own, albeit of a less pastoral sort than that which dominated Club 47. Nowlin recalls neither guns nor knives but confirms the seedy, rough-hewn feel of the bar. Their devotion to the Lilly Brothers afforded the roommates a glimpse of southern musicians as

flesh and blood working people, not merely as idealized knights on the front lines of a revivalist crusade. Given what lay ahead, it was perhaps an invaluable experience.

In still other respects, their willingness to explore brought them insights beyond those afforded the casual fan. One summer, Irwin took a survey course in music appreciation, the only music course of his college career. Because it required a great deal of listening, he became a frequent visitor to the campus music library. Though the course fare was predominantly classical, he often perused the holdings for other items of interest. Upon looking up “bluegrass” in the catalog he came upon only one album, which he happened to have heard on Hillbilly at Harvard. He borrowed it and that record—Folk Songs from the Bluegrass by Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys—became his "daily companion that summer." Roughly one year later, he was in a Sam Goody’s record outlet in New York. He located that Taylor album, as well as an additional album by the same musicians. As he studied the jackets, contemplating which to buy with his limited funds, a large man standing nearby said, "They’re both good." The man was Loy Beaver, a New York-area undertaker with some interesting stories to tell.[40]

Music had fascinated Beaver since his childhood in north Georgia and he claimed that as a boy he knew many musicians in his native area including the legendary Fiddlin’ John Carson. As a young man he worked as a traveling salesman for an embalming fluid company, crisscrossing the states of Tennessee and Kentucky and steeping himself in the local music. Employed as an undertaker in 1945, he claimed to have embalmed Franklin D. Roosevelt after the President passed away in Warm Springs, Georgia. Some time later, he moved to New York where he raised a family and found further work in the funeral industry. There, he heard about Dave Freeman, a New York mailman and rare record

collector who shared Beaver's interest in southern string band music from the twenties and thirties. Beaver tracked Freeman down and introduced himself, and Freeman encouraged Beaver's own burgeoning interest in collecting old 78-rpm discs, an avocation at which the undertaker soon excelled. In Freeman's words, Beaver "was amazing [at collecting] . . . I don't know how he did it, but every trip he made he'd come back with a ton of records. He could luck on to the right people—he had a nose for it, or he had good luck, and mostly he'd be able to talk them out of their records. He ended up in a very short time putting together a very, very nice collection of records." Freeman's own strong interests soon led him to found County Records, which began as a vehicle for reissuing early country music recorded originally on 78s. Beaver assisted him with his first releases in 1964, collections entitled Mountain Fiddle Tunes and Mountain Ballads.[41]

In talking people "out of their records" Beaver undoubtedly displayed the same friendliness and gregariousness that enabled him to introduce himself to Freeman and address Irwin in Sam Goody's. Beaver described his collection to Irwin, gave the fascinated young man his phone number and invited him over to listen to music. Back at Tufts, Irwin and Nowlin checked the notes to some County releases and saw credits thanking Beaver for his assistance. "We had hit the jackpot," thought Irwin. On a future vacation they visited Beaver at home, bringing along Nowlin's tape recorder. There, they found "records, walls of them, all neatly filed." Beaver made selections. When the roommates heard something they liked, he pulled out still more by the same performer, allowing Nowlin to tape whatever he wished. They returned to Tufts believing, in Irwin's words, that "we probably had the best collection of old-time music in the entire Boston

area. We also went back thinking about all the stories we heard from Loy about the artists and knew we wanted to hear and learn as much as we could about the artists and the music."[42] Irwin and Nowlin visited Beaver together on one other occasion and Nowlin visited once, alone. The older man went on to loan his vast collection of 78s to many reissue producers and, eventually, his home "became a kind of salon for weekly picking and listening sessions frequented by old time musicians and 78 collectors."[43]

In addition to their early exposure to these relocated southerners, Irwin and Nowlin journeyed south themselves to hear their passion at its source. The genesis of these excursions lay in Folkways Records and Club 47. Each night as the audience entered, the Club played albums over its sound system. One evening, intrigued by the sound of some recorded old-time fiddling, the duo examined the record jacket hanging near the entrance and discovered they were listening to a live Folkways' recording made at the 37th Old Time Fiddlers' Convention at Union Grove, North Carolina. Shortly thereafter, they located the LP at Briggs and Briggs, the record shop where they spent hours furthering their education through liner notes and listening. Taking the album into a listening booth, they played the entire collection while studying the notes, learning for the first time about an event that even then was a venerated institution and one that had tremendous impact upon the future label owners. "Union Grove," wrote Irwin, describing his fascination with southern traditional music, "was what really did it for me."[44]

The southern fiddling convention, or contest, has historically been a forum that mixed professional and amateur musicians. As discussed previously, early commercial country artists such as Fiddlin' John Carson and Clayton McMichen worked the contest circuit in the twenties and thirties, even after they had recorded. Begun in 1924, the

Union Grove Convention attracted a mix of skilled amateurs, weekend professionals, faded hopefuls and those with ongoing commercial ambition. H.P. Van Hoy, a teacher and amateur musician, began the Convention as a fundraiser for his local school district. Musicians paid an entry fee and competed for awards in the Best Old-Time Band category and, later, various individual categories. Approximately 150 people attended the first event, where they witnessed competition among six local string bands. The money raised was split equally between the winners and the school. For nearly 35 years the Convention remained a predominantly local affair until the burgeoning folk revival began attracting some of the more devoted northern performers and fans. The year 1957 saw 109 entrants, of whom 88 were from North Carolina. The balance also hailed from the old Confederacy, save for one band from Muncie, Indiana. That same year, organizers augmented the "old time" competition with an additional category for "modern" performance, encompassing western swing, popular country music and even some rock and roll tunes such as "Hound Dog" and "Blue Suede Shoes." Despite the broadening of acceptable repertoire, organizers prohibited electric instruments and the majority of bands performed traditional tunes. In 1959 a smaller gathering of 55 entrants included 51 from North Carolina and one each from Virginia and Tennessee. The remaining two consisted of died-in-the–wool revivalists—Mike Seeger, who would soon co-produce the Folkways LP that introduced Irwin and Nowlin to the Convention, and New York's Greenbriar Boys, who went on to win the old time band competition in 1960.[45]

Irwin and Nowlin attended for the first time in 1966. "We learned that the festival took place each Easter weekend down in North Carolina," said Irwin, "and we vowed then to try and get there that year. The following spring, Bill and I, by then experienced

hitchhikers, packed up, got our shirt cardboards and magic markers (or the equivalents) and headed for Union Grove."[46] Within a couple of years the glare of national press would dramatically alter the complexion of the event, drawing an odd mix of bikers and college students, many of whom seemed more interested in alcohol than music. But in 1966, though attendance reached an estimated 8,500 people, the convention still struck the two outsiders from Boston as a southern and family-oriented affair. On that first visit they bedded down in their sleeping bags under a Tyson Foods truck. Nowlin's most vivid recollection is of "old guys." Irwin was "particularly impressed by the egalitarian nature of the music." Not confined to the stage, musicians spread themselves throughout the audience, playing in a huge field where, Irwin recalls, "they were just normal people . . . the young and old and back porch pickers and everybody just having such a good time. It made it so much more accessible than 'they' being on stage and 'we' being the audience. You'd just mix in and sing along." They had such a good time they returned the following year when they saw a performance by George Pegram, a local singer and banjo player who had been performing at southern contests, fairs and dances for roughly three decades. Within a few years Nowlin's photograph of that performance would grace the cover of Rounder's first release, as Pegram became the label's inaugural artist. [47]

In the summer of 1967, with Nowlin in Europe, Irwin journeyed to Galax, Virginia, to attend still another fiddler's convention. Hitching home, he and a friend received a ride from Ken Davidson, a West Virginia resident who ran Kanawha Records, a miniscule company devoted to documenting the indigenous music of the Appalachian hills. Driver and passengers discovered their common interests and, since it was growing late, Davidson invited his guests to spend the night at his nearby home. The next day,

Davidson and Irwin visited several local musicians, including 71-year-old Clark Kessinger, a sometime house painter and fiddle master whose professional career on the far edges of the country music industry encompassed local dances, radio broadcasts, the Grand Ole Opry and almost 100 tunes recorded for Brunswick Records between 1928 and 1930. Kessinger's festival appearances ranged from the National Folk Festival in 1934 to the Newport Folk Festival in 1966. He was also a fiddle contest veteran, who counted among his many awards a World Champion trophy awarded at Union Grove in 1966, in what convention chronicler Pat Ahrens reports was a display of "unprecedented unanimity" by all 12 judges. Kessinger promptly took his trophy to New York, where he shared it with TV personality Hugh Downs and the millions who watched NBC-TV's Today Show.[48]

More than a source of entertainment, records and interesting stories, the visits to Hillbilly Ranch, Union Grove and Galax, as well as their friendship with Beaver, provided the two young folk fans with a perspective that they could never have found solely among their revivalist peers lined up outside Club 47. Folklorist Alan Jabbour met the Rounders at a fiddling convention several years after they began their journeys to the south. "They were just trying to plug into this world," he recalls. "Going to fiddlers' conventions is a great way to do that. It was even a greater way back then. [The conventions] were perhaps a little more local and a little less hothouse than they later became." [49] The music lovers met people who grew up with early country music and who saw it as something other than the antiqued residue of an imagined pastoral wonderland. To this larger circle, the enjoyment of southern rural sounds was not part of a political stance, nor an attempt—conscious or otherwise—at the construction of a currently

fashionable identity. It was, to be sure, a vibrant and meaningful part of the lives of both musicians and fans but one understood intuitively as a commercial, as well as an artistic, endeavor. The music was an element of popular culture. It was entertainment. It was what you did after work or on Saturday night. It displayed itself before crowds who saw no contradiction in being simultaneously appreciative and irreverent.

Moreover, those whom the Rounders encountered within this broader circle were of flesh and bone. They were working people and, though possessed of often impassioned artistic impulses, they were not the disembodied knights and saints that floated through the pages of Sing Out! Jabbour contrasts the Rounders' experience with that of Moe Asch of Folkways Records, whose aesthetic, broad as it was, developed solely within the urban revival. Asch released old-time and bluegrass LPs but, says Jabbour, "that really wasn't his world. He certainly never showed up at Union Grove or Galax or the other fiddling conventions. He was from an urban world and everything that came to him, however rural and marginal, came to him because it was filtered through people in that urban world and they brought it to him."[50] The Rounders, on the other hand, made some attempt to meet the rural world on its own ground. However abbreviated and imperfect such efforts were, they offered experiences that mingled with their admitted romanticization. The full impact of those experiences lay undeveloped for years until they befriended, recorded and marketed countless members of the once-imagined folk.

Notwithstanding their extensive outside interests, the two apparently managed to study. In 1966 they each graduated from Tufts, Irwin with a degree in Psychology and Nowlin in Political Science. Despite the time and energy they devoted to music as undergraduates, neither had considered a career in the music business. Asked to

characterize his personal connection to music during his college years, Nowlin mentioned his involvement with putting up posters in return for tickets but saw himself primarily "just as a fan, a record collector and I liked to go see these different concerts. There was nothing beyond that."[51] After a summer teaching in a Headstart program, Irwin enrolled in Boston's Wheelock College to pursue graduate work in Special Education. Simultaneously, he worked as an assistant teacher with emotionally disabled children, including those suffering from autism. Nowlin entered the graduate program in Political Science at the University of Chicago. There his interests focused initially on political socialization—the study of how people develop their attitudes about politics, political issues and political personalities. Political power fascinated him. "Why do some people seek power?" he asked. "Why do some people respond to powerful leaders? Why does a Hitler attract attention? What need does he fulfill for people that want to be followers? . . . It gets into all sorts of questions about racism, questions about sexism, and things like that. Why do we develop the kind of attitudes we have about things?"[52] This analytical interest in the exercise of power contributed over the next several years to a personal political transformation that proved essential to the later identity of Rounder.

At the outset of his undergraduate years Nowlin attended several meetings of the Young Americans for Freedom, the rightwing youth group that supported U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater, eventually the Republican Party's 1964 presidential nominee. However, his admiration for Goldwater crumbled after the Senator opposed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. This opposition rested ostensibly upon the mainstream conservative position that the proposed law interfered with states' rights, a view that the law's proponents considered a smokescreen for segregation. Nowlin, who viewed the

issue as a simple matter of tolerance, had respected Goldwater in part because he believed that the Senator was a fair-minded, racially accepting conservative. Goldwater was part Jewish and his family's department store was known, "to some extent at least," as a fair employer. Additionally Goldwater was knowledgeable about and professed an interest in Native American culture, a position that reflected one segment of his Arizona constituency. As the civil rights struggle gained national attention, Nowlin hoped that the Senator would use his position to demonstrate that conservatives believed in racial tolerance and inclusiveness. Instead, he concluded that Goldwater had sold out his own tolerant beliefs—or what Nowlin presumed were his beliefs—to advance the political cause of the Republican Party in the south and his own Presidential aspirations, an approach that the young idealist deemed unacceptable. While Goldwater's civil rights stance helped break the Democrats' electoral stranglehold on the southern states, it pushed Nowlin into a state of relative political apathy, a posture that dominated his undergraduate years.[53]

In Chicago his political interests returned, in part due to the overpowering presence of the city itself. While some considered Tufts an urban school, it had seemed thoroughly suburban to local boy Nowlin. A mere seven miles from where he grew up, it allowed limitless access to the nest, to which Nowlin returned regularly to do his laundry, eat a meal or borrow his parents' car. The urban problems of greater Boston were largely invisible to this relatively privileged youth, absorbed in school and music, and still warm in his family's embrace. The south side of Chicago, by contrast, was a ghetto, worlds away from anything he had ever experienced. With quick trips back home no longer possible, Nowlin became more attuned to his urban surroundings and the palpable

black/white divide experienced with every trip to the market or laundromat. He underwent a far more dramatic change after that first year of graduate school when, during the summer of 1967, he undertook a ten-week solo tour of Europe, bankrolled by his father. Extremely homesick at first, he stuck it out and now considers the trip "a seminal event in my life." Throughout western Europe, he saw graffiti that read "US = SS," a reference comparing his country's role in Vietnam to the fascist takeover of Europe just a quarter-century earlier. Until then he had paid little attention to the Southeast Asian conflict but young Europeans asked him about it regularly. Though he explained dutifully that the U.S. was needed to keep the Communist dominos from tumbling, he had no real confidence in this position. Many asked him about race relations in the United States as well, and he had no easy answer for why continuing racial disharmony kept his country in turmoil.[54]

Entering Yugoslavia filled him with fear, a vestige of his longstanding anti-Communist fervor. He was surprised to find no overt oppression, no gun-toting soldiers on the streets and even a disinterest by the border guards in examining his passport. He realizes now that Yugoslavia was an atypical eastern-bloc state and that his experience might have differed had he tried, for example, to pass into East Berlin. Still, at the time, it challenged his perceptions. He was blissfully ignorant of the reality of more deep-seated, hidden oppression and he was unaware of the many racial and ethnic divisions that embroiled eastern Europeans. He was caught up in the easy tolerance and unencumbered questioning of youth during a year in which the scent of political and cultural change was palpable. Alone, far from home, constantly hitchhiking and conversing regularly with people from another world, he felt freer than ever before. Everything he saw and heard

broadened his perceptions and ended any remaining possibility that he would come home merely to immerse himself in some Republican campaign. "To see that there were these other people that lived in other parts of the world that got along fine, that you could joke with them even if you didn't know a word of their language . . . that Charlie Chaplin could make everybody laugh cause what he does is funny. It just kind of came together." One sign of his personal transition, significant in the context of the times, was the increasing length of his hair. He began letting it grow while in Europe and did not cut it again until 1974.[55]

On the island of Crete he met Bill Kornrich, a politically left-leaning American student about to enter his first year in the University of Chicago's graduate Sociology program. They decided to room together back in the States and in the fall of 1967 they traveled to Washington, DC to attend one of the growing number of mass demonstrations protesting U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Nowlin did not yet consider himself a political leftist, nor was he a committed opponent of the war, about which he had still thought relatively little. But Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies, then the clown princes of the American left, had announced that, utilizing the combined psychic energy of the assembled demonstrators, they would levitate the Pentagon and exorcise the evil spirits within. To Nowlin this was simply great political theater of the type that had intrigued him since he was a boy. He went to the Pentagon rally less to protest the war than because he thought it would be "fun."[56]

The march radicalized him. He saw U.S. Marshals wade into the crowd starting fights. They "would just go club somebody," he recalls. They looked to him like "thugs" who contrasted sharply with the more benign border guards he had encountered behind

the iron curtain. "I never went through a non-violent pacifist phase or something. I just started throwing stuff at 'em. They made themselves the enemy. I just soaked up all this stuff immediately from the movement people around and I was instantly converted to the cause." After a few photos he took of the rally appeared in a University of Chicago student newspaper, he started attending every demonstration that came along, taking pictures. He attended a few meetings of the Students for a Democratic Society, the group that came to symbolize the New Left of the 1960s, but their endless talk bored him. He wanted action. In May 1968 he returned to Washington, DC and spent time at Resurrection City, the poor people's encampment on the national mall that federal authorities razed after approximately six weeks of existence.[57]

In between these two trips to the nation's capital Nowlin pursued his coursework. He had never struggled academically at Tufts but found himself unprepared for the rigors of graduate work at the University of Chicago. Throwing himself into his studies, he managed to do well in his first year but then began to lose his bearings. Intrigued by a wide variety of creative outlets, he wanted to pursue photography, his newest passion. Inspired by a girlfriend, he hoped to study Italian. His University advisor told him that he was free to pursue these interests on his own time—if he could find such time—but that his formal coursework had to advance his graduate studies in political science. Eventually, his department rejected his proposal for a doctoral dissertation built around his photographs of Resurrection City. Instead, following his advisor's advice, he turned his experiences there into a Master's thesis and left the program without obtaining a Ph.D. Later, in the fall of 1968, he returned to Tufts to complete a doctorate in Political Science, finally receiving that degree in 1980, ten years after he helped found Rounder.[58]

Reflecting today upon his self-described "instant conversion" to leftwing radicalism, Nowlin does not mention political theorists, admired professors or influential books. He eventually did develop a theoretical political perspective but the earliest phase of his leftward shift is characterized more by a fascination with direct action as opposed to any theoretical rationale for such action. Still a romantic at heart, he was swept up in the theatrical aspects of the political and cultural ferment that marked the sixties. The ease and relative speed with which he moved into that world, coupled with the fact that his political leanings have remained on the left, suggest that his new political stance was a far more accurate reflection of his core beliefs than the conservative Republicanism that it replaced. Today, he maintains that the bedrock of his political philosophy is a libertarianism opposing the oppressive power of the state. But clearly he favors the exercise of such power when he sees it as necessary to foster the freedom of those otherwise suppressed. Looking backward, his disillusionment with Goldwater's opposition to national civil rights legislation stands as the first concrete political position of the adult Nowlin, who would ultimately advance his belief in cultural equity through music.

While Nowlin adjusted to graduate school on the way to his eventual new identity as a street radical, Irwin pursued his graduate studies back in Boston. The two kept in touch and by pre-arrangement met at the Union Grove Fiddlers Convention in the spring of 1967, shortly before Nowlin began his European excursion. Irwin, in pursuit of a career in Special Education, spent the summer of that year in Portland, Maine, working at The Spurwink School, a facility devoted to children with psychological or neurological impairments. There, while he was sitting in a coffee shop reading Meaning of the Blues

by Paul Oliver, Marian Leighton approached and asked if he was "talkable." Leighton, who had just completed her freshman year at Northeastern University, was back in her native state for the summer, working as an intern for the Portland Urban Redevelopment Authority. Irwin invited her to join him.[59]

Marian Leighton was born in 1948 and raised near the town of Cherryfield in rural Washington County, Maine, the easternmost county in the United States. Her childhood, like that of many bright kids raised in parochial surroundings, reflected a tension between the need to adapt and the instinctive desire to move beyond. She was the oldest of four children in a working-class family occupying a rung on the economic ladder somewhat below that of the Irwins and the Nowlins. Her father did what he needed to support his family. At various times he worked in the lumber industry, served as a hunting and fishing guide and raked blueberries for commercial sale. Though primarily a homemaker, her mother worked at times as a motel maid and also joined in the berry gathering, as did Marian. "It sounds so nineteenth-century [but] a main form of employment was either to work in the blueberry factory or to work in the fields which is what I did every summer when I was growing up, because that's what practically every kid that I knew did as their summer employment to earn their money for their school clothes for the next year." The family kept a root cellar and a subsistence garden. "We raised all of our own potatoes, we raised a lot of our vegetables. My mother would can vegetables for the winter, green beans and carrots and peas and all of that kind of stuff and you'd use them through the winter time and never have to buy canned goods." When Leighton sought financial aid in 1966 to support her first year in college, the family reported an annual income of $2200.00. [60]

Despite the omnipresent physical labor and the low wages, responsible parents and a fundamentally stable, loving family made certain that Leighton never felt poor. They had food, plenty of books and, once Leighton reached junior high, a television set. The community was close-knit in the sense that everyone knew everyone else, an inevitability when virtually everyone patronized the same small number of stores, worshipped at the same few churches and attended the same school, where "teachers were usually people who had taught your parents and sometimes even your grandparents." It was also extremely homogeneous, which Leighton sees as "both its strength and its weakness." Leighton, who converted to Judaism upon her marriage, never saw an African-American or, knowingly, a Jew until college. Local churches were either Congregational or Baptist. The only apparent diversity stemmed from the annual migration of the Mi'kmaq—commonly called the Micmac—a Native-American tribe from the Canadian Maritimes that traveled down the Atlantic coast every summer to work on the blueberry harvest alongside the locals. Outside the fields there was little mixing with the tribe, whom the townspeople tended to disdain. On payday, after one too many drinks, bored Mi'kmaq might entertain themselves by jumping off the bridge that spanned the Narraguagas River. One of Leighton's more negative recollections is of her own neighbors gathering along the river "to see what the Indians were going to do this Saturday night," a sport she attributes to the sad need of those who had little, to look down upon those who had even less.[61]

Music played no significant role in her childhood, evoking only a few memories. Her dad turned the radio on at about 5:30 AM almost every day, but it served primarily as a tool to provide local news and weather reports as the family hurried to work, school or

church. She had a female cousin who "was a mad Elvis fan," but Leighton "loathed him—he reminded me of local guys I couldn't stand."[62] Some pop hits filtered through. She has a distinct recollection of Ray Charles' 1961 smash, "Hit The Road, Jack," and Roger Miller's trademark, "King of the Road," a similarly huge hit in 1965. Ironically, each was a bit of a genre-crosser, a fact that escaped Leighton, who would later explore much more pronounced crossings at Rounder. Her mother liked country music, as did many of her neighbors, and Leighton recalls hearing Hank Williams singing "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" on her family's wind-up phonograph. Retrospectively she describes that record as the most soulful piece of music she heard as a child. In high school she turned against country music as part of a broader rebellion against what she saw as her narrow surroundings. In a self-described highbrow mood, she ordered a classical piano album through a record club and was surprised when it seemed to threaten her parents, who undoubtedly sensed their daughter's restiveness. Though she enjoyed it for a while, it really didn't speak to her musically and it soon grew boring. The British Invasion escaped her notice entirely, though its initial wave occurred while she was in high school. Unlike most of the country, she didn't watch the Beatles appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show in February 1964.[63]

Though not particularly interested in popular culture, she embraced the Baptist church, where her involvement encompassed regular attendance at Sunday school as well as Bible workshops and a leadership role in her congregation's youth group. She also sang in the choir and, while not the best of singers, could solo when needed. Still, she reserves her most heartfelt disdain for the hymns she once mastered, which represented the limitations imposed by her cloistered, "white bread" community. "My entire memory

of Baptist hymns when I grew up were of these people singing in high, thin, shrieky, repressed voices that were extremely unappealing; with people who had no sense of rhythm whatsoever pounding out the melody on the piano." Those hymns were, of course, examples of true vernacular expression, of the general type that Rounder would one day document. Despite Leighton's remembered distaste, something about that music—something comforting—stuck with her. Irwin recalls long automobile rides that he took with Leighton after she reached adulthood during which she would sing those hymns at his request.[64]

Leighton's strongest effort to transcend her surroundings involved her absolute immersion in books. Her parents encouraged reading and on occasion would read the encyclopedia aloud. Though he lacked a high school diploma, her father enjoyed enhancing his and his children's vocabulary by picking words out of the dictionary for study. Leighton read through much of her town's small library, both because books presented her with an immediate alternative reality and because she saw them as the vehicle that would take her out of rural Maine. Reflecting her church involvement, she loved reading the Bible. Another book that had a huge impact on her was None Dare Call It Treason, John Stormer's 1964 anti-Communist polemic. Published to coincide with Goldwater's presidential campaign and promoted heavily by the far right John Birch Society, it argued that the United States was not only complicit in the spread of worldwide Communism but was itself in extreme danger of being brought down by internal subversion. Patriotic and Christian, Leighton accepted its thesis wholeheartedly and in her role as an active high school debater argued the case for a Goldwater victory.[65]

Her Christian leanings were the direct source of her earliest motivation to leave and see the world. While still in junior high, she began ordering Bible college catalogs, determined to become a missionary and "save the heathens of Africa and China"—a dream that reflected the downside of her close knit community, "where you're interpreting the rest of the world in your own very limited black and white world view." An ardent social Darwinist, she "really believed that people make their own situation in the world and people like the ones that I grew up with, if they are underprivileged and economically deprived—economically and culturally depressed—it's their own doing . . . I'd never met a black person," she adds, "but I believed that probably black people in the south were discriminated against in part because they created that [situation for themselves]." Thus, she was determined not only to move beyond her relatively limited world but to offer assistance to others, provided they were willing to do the heavy lifting needed to better themselves.[66]

She remembers vividly the first incident that shook her worldview, the one that first suggested that inequality and oppression could shape the lives of others to a degree they could not control. One of her high school teachers showed her a story in the New York Times about Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney, the three civil rights workers, two northern whites and a southern black, who were brutally murdered by Mississippi racists. "I remember to this day sitting there in disbelief. This can't be. I can't understand how this could happen. This must be communist propaganda, but knowing this was the front page of a national newspaper. . . There's no way that the communists so completely controlled the New York Times that they could get all of these facts and this entire story to be created out of nothing; that there had to be truth to this. . ." Compounding her

difficulty was trust in her teacher, who had always recommended provocative reading. This was "my best teacher bringing that in, who I respected a lot and I knew she was no flaming liberal who was supporting communists. She was simply a normal, very intelligent and half-way well read person for our part of the world and that sort of started my doubting . . ."[67]

This teacher's openness contrasted sharply with the closed minds of others she had trusted. Her reading was broad, encompassing Russian literature and Shakespeare, and she fell in love with the possibilities inherent in interpretive analysis. She mentioned this one day to her minister, to whom her church activity had brought her especially close, and his reaction stunned her. He mumbled something about Shakespeare being "very important secular literature" in a tone that made it plain that the bard not only occupied a realm lower than that of the Bible, but that her predilection was likely to lead her straight to hell. Grasping that this was a part of her life that she could not share with the church, and knowing also that it was a pleasure she would not surrender, Leighton chose sides decisively. "I remember thinking to myself, I love these books and I won't give them up. So, if I won't give them up, I guess I'll have to stop being a Baptist, which I did by the time I was a freshman in college. I considered that I was an atheist."[68]

Determined to go to college, she worked hard and became valedictorian of her small high school class. As her religious faith waned, her interest in Bible colleges transformed itself into a hunger for information about colleges of all types and she took to ordering the catalogs of many institutions. Getting out of Washington County became her focus. I would "sit and read [the catalogs] and look at the pictures and daydream about what it would be like to be in college." She came from an environment that no one

left. Her father had been outside of Maine only once, journeying to Connecticut before Leighton was born to attempt work in a factory. His sojourn lasted about three weeks. Consequently her open desire to leave caused tremendous conflict, especially with her strong-willed, dominant and vocal mother, who saw rejection in her daughter's increasingly palpable desire for escape.[69]

Notwithstanding what must have been considerable anguish, her parents did not stand in her way. Buttressed by financial aid, Leighton entered Boston's Northeastern University in the fall of 1966, majoring initially in Political Science. There she discovered the promise of the rich, culturally vibrant life that she'd dreamed of since reading Hemingway's A Moveable Feast in high school. Enthralled by opportunity, she spent a great deal of time in bookstores and at the theater, exploring the wonders of Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, among others. Given what she believed was an inadequate high school education, she assumed she would have to struggle for grades but instead found her coursework relatively easy. Desiring true intellectual exchange, she disliked Northeastern's large lecture halls, which allowed for little more than the rote delivery of information. By the time she met Irwin in the summer of 1967, she had arranged a sophomore transfer to Clark University, roughly 35 miles from Boston, where the smaller, seminar-rich format was more to her liking. Leighton and Irwin began a romance that lasted through the birth of Rounder and into the early-1970s, after which they continued their relationship as business partners and friends. In the fall of 1967, with his Masters degree in hand, Irwin shifted his studies to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. He hoped to earn a doctorate in family counseling, an ambition he says he abandoned when he could not find academic support for a proposed dissertation

analyzing the role of women in country song lyrics. He hitched to Boston regularly during the 1967 academic year, where Leighton replaced the absent Nowlin as his steady companion at concerts and the theater. Over the next few years, their academic schedules were punctuated by leaves-of-absence that allowed them to live together in both the Boston area and Ithaca.[70]

Leighton's musical interests expanded dramatically, in part due to Irwin's influence, in part due to her own desire to sample absolutely everything. She began listening to Hillbilly at Harvard, able now to perceive country music as something other than the narrow expression of a provincial hometown. She also experienced live bluegrass for the first time at Club 47, where she saw The Charles River Valley Boys, Boston-area locals and longtime revival stalwarts. It was at the 47 that she met Nowlin, in Boston for a visit, when the three attended a show by Chicago bluesmen Junior Wells and Buddy Guy. In the spring of 1968 she joined Irwin and Nowlin for their now annual sojourn to Union Grove.[71] By this time folk music, however defined, was not the only offering at the table. Rock had gained in gravitas and assumed many of the functions of popular folk revivalism. Though it lacked folk's more explicit connection to disparate American subcultures, it did create at least the illusion of a single, unified culture among its listeners and at times offered overt political commentary of a type that had been the hallmark of much contemporary folk. To varying degrees, Irwin, Nowlin and Leighton enjoyed rock as well as folk. They were all fans of Bob Dylan, now identified more as a rock artist than a folk star. Leighton and Nowlin admired the more blues- oriented groups, such as The Rolling Stones and The Animals, and Nowlin enjoyed Cream, The Doors, Jimi Hendrix and Country Joe and the Fish.[72]

It was through rock and roll that Leighton first experienced the full force of music's emotive power when, with Irwin, she attended a Little Richard concert that left her with an indelible image of personal freedom embodied. Though appreciated now as a rock and roll pioneer, Little Richard was not, in the late sixties, widely understood as a seminal figure. As rock grew in self-importance and ranged stylistically through psychedelia and early metal, fans saw Richard, and other first generation rockers such as Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, largely as novelty acts, purveyors of "golden oldies" focusing on dating, school days and other teen-age ephemera. But watching Richard Penniman in concert around 1968 or 1969, Leighton and Irwin saw freedom in the form of a dancing, shrieking, gender-bending, African-American libertine. With song, movement, dress, cosmetics and the color of his skin, Richard had seemingly thrown off the strictures that oppressed not just blacks but everyone. Recognizing the power of the politics of culture, Leighton saw Richard as "more radical than a lot of the people who were so-called radicals." She recalled him playing in a fairly small room, one appropriate to his then diminished star power:

> He was playing a white piano and he was wearing these red bell-bottom silk pants with this red loose top that had little diamond-shaped mirrors all over it. Then, after he completely sweated the whole thing through . . . he then got up on top of the piano and he took off his shirt and he twirled it around like this and he threw it into the crowd. . . Talk about true personal liberation, just in terms of flying in the face of everything that establishment culture looks like, talks like, walks like. Here's Little Richard and to me it was like the freeing of your soul. And that's the way I think of music and politics and the thing that I really love is there is a transcendent moment to it all. And Little Richard—man oh man—at that point he personified the transcendent moment in all its glory.[73]

Captivated by that transcendent sense of freedom, Leighton and Irwin, like Nowlin, were swept up by the increasingly ubiquitous politics of the street. Irwin's first demonstration was an anti-Vietnam War rally in New York City, which he attended in the late sixties in the company of his older brother. In a parallel to Nowlin's experience at the Pentagon, what politicized him most was not the war but the violent, abusive suppression of speech by the police, who seemed to hate the demonstrators with a passion entirely personal. He recalls a motorcycle officer who rode along the line of protestors, kicking Irwin and others as he went. "I also remember going up to him later and confronting him and telling him I thought that was totally inappropriate and he suggested we meet after he was off duty to settle things."[74] He and Leighton often hitchhiked from the Clark campus to rallies in downtown Boston carrying football helmets, in the event the police began swinging billy clubs. In April 1969 they were among those on streets of Ithaca voicing support for a contingent of armed African-American students who occupied the Cornell University Student Union building. Beyond demonstrating, Leighton immersed herself in political discussion, participating in campus "consciousness raising" sessions that focused on racism, sexism and the Vietnam War. Her political conversion was only marginally less instantaneous than that of Nowlin. From her anti-Communist, Christian, conservative beginnings, she became a self-styled moderate Republican by the end of her freshman college year and a leftist SDS sympathizer by the time she was a junior.[75]

Her parents grew increasingly distraught as their daughter moved further away from the observant Baptist of just a few years earlier. The March 1967 issue of Ramparts, the leftist periodical devoted to politics and culture, provoked a particularly angry row

with her mother. That issue contained a story on the long-running mistreatment of the Native-American Passamaquodia tribe, which resided on reservations in eastern Maine, making its members Leighton family neighbors. Quoting tribal claims that "the State of Maine's been stripping the timber from our land, selling it and never accounting to us for the money" and "no one will prosecute you in the state of Maine for robbing Indians," the article provided a great deal of ammunition for a college student ready to find fault with a community she had concluded was insular and racist. A second article offered a prescription for a new and better life, one far removed from the typical Washington County mindset. "Hippies," it asserted, "have a clear vision of the ideal community—a psychedelic community" which "necessarily embodies a radical political philosophy: communal life, drastic restriction of private property, rejection of violence, creativity before consumption, freedom before authority, de-emphasis of government and traditional forms of leadership." Leighton's devotion to the "truths" contained in this particular Ramparts issue proved too much for her mother, who deemed her an unfit influence on her younger siblings, and prompted a "several month estrangement when it was made clear that my presence would be unwelcome during college vacations."[76]

It was through politics that Leighton and Nowlin formed a friendship somewhat independent of her relationship with Irwin. For Irwin, participation in the protest movements of the sixties was a more-or-less natural extension of the leftist political climate within which he had grown up. Leighton and Nowlin, however, not only possessed a more innate interest in matters political but, as former rightwing Republicans, had the fervor of converts. Far more than Irwin, whom music dominated, they identified themselves as political beings and threw themselves into the process of political analysis.

However, though they debated theory, joined countless demonstrations and wrote occasional articles for the newsletter of the Black Rose Collective, a Boston anarchist organization, they never engaged in the time-consuming task of systematic, long-term organization. Their political involvement was always more intellectual and experiential than programmatic. They admired Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, well-known American anarchists during the early twentieth century. Nowlin eventually wrote his doctoral dissertation on Berkman, who believed strongly in the power of ideas and the growth of personal consciousness as essential precursors to social transformation. In Nowlin's words, the anarchist maintained that "the American class structure rested on a social myth, [which held] that the United States was a special country, uniquely free and selflessly benevolent, welcoming the unfortunates of other lands and offering true liberty and justice for all." Only "patient education could help [Americans] liberate themselves" from this myth, so they could then commence the hard work of building something that truly fulfilled America's promise. As part of this journey Berkman considered it essential "to instill in the young an inquisitive spirit, an empirical approach testing for verification, a love of freedom and a willingness to be different—to rebel if necessary . . ." Nowlin and Leighton saw themselves in the vanguard of those who would demolish the myth. Ultimately, their contribution to the future took the form not of a new political or governmental structure but of a record company.[77]

Before that company formed, there was more to experience. In the summer of 1968 Irwin and Leighton made their way to San Francisco through a combination of hitchhiking and "driveaway" cars, delivering vehicles to distant states on behalf of owners who did not want to drive themselves. More than 30 years after that trip, Irwin

still teases Leighton about the weight of the books she insisted they carry on their backs, which represented a small library of counter-cultural self-discovery. "I do remember as we were hitchhiking across country reading out loud to Ken from Thomas Mann's Magic Mountain," says Leighton. "I read Buddenbrooks that summer. I read Herman Hesse who was very in vogue at that time. So I read all of Steppenwolf and Siddhartha and Magister Ludi and Demian. Oh, Demian was very big back then, although I did think that they were a little bit lightweight, but Thomas Mann was more my kind of thing and Brecht and people like that." On what was fundamentally a pleasure trip, countercultural style, they soaked in the rich Bay Area environment through panhandling, living in "crashpads" and attending musical and political events. Rallies urging the state to free Huey Newton, the Black Panther leader jailed on charges of killing a police officer, mingled with trips to see Flatt and Scruggs at the Hungry i, the famed San Francisco nightclub, and excursions to outdoor concerts where Leighton recalls seeing "Jefferson Airplane and Janis Joplin and Quicksilver Messenger Service and all these embarrassingly bad bands [like] Steppenwolf." They held a brief reunion with Nowlin, who was traveling separately and had been participating in political rallies across the bay in nearby Berkeley.[78]

Irwin and Leighton still find humor in her insistence that she needed her hairdryer on the trip, which she now maintains was necessary to keep her hair straight "the way a hippie should." They both recognize that their adventure contained an element of slumming. Despite staying with apparent transients in rundown storefronts, panhandling and even shoplifting, they managed to see a production of A Streetcar Named Desire at San Francisco's prestigious American Conservatory Theatre. They knew they would be returning to school in the fall, where Irwin held a position as a teaching assistant and

Leighton anticipated the renewal of her financial aid package, a renewal confirmed before the summer's end. "Ken was, I think, more interested in entertaining the notion of himself as more of a hippie," says Leighton, "whereas I was simply more into entertaining the notion of this as a good thing to do to sort of see some more of the country." Their ultimate motivation arose from the fact that they, like Nowlin, were young, confidant, extremely resourceful and possessed of an intense desire to participate fully in their times.[79]

Through their varied pursuits, music remained a touchstone. They received a stream of free albums by contributing record reviews to small periodicals. Irwin and Leighton helped establish the Ithaca Friends of Bluegrass and Old Time Country Music and they produced concerts around the Cornell campus. Some of the musicians they met during their time in upstate New York, such as Walt Koken, later of the influential Highwoods String Band, and banjo innovator Tony Trischka, went on to long careers in music and spent years as Rounder artists. Others added to their close exposure to native southerners who, like the Lilly Brothers and Loy Beaver, came to rural string band music as a natural outgrowth of their own heritage and not as a youthful attempt to explore unknown worlds. In one particularly exciting endeavor, Irwin and Leighton arranged an Ithaca performance by Red Allen, a native Kentuckian and a marvelous bluegrass singer, who had recorded with the influential Osborne Brothers in the fifties. Upon his arrival, Allen proved to be neither noble nor romantic, but extraordinarily unpleasant, leading Leighton to characterize the experience as a "worst nightmare." Completely naïve, the fledgling promoters had no written contract with Allen, who insisted on a payment that his hosts believed exceeded their oral commitment. He made long distance phone calls

from Irwin and Leighton's home without asking and, in a real clash of sensibilities, "smoked up a storm." It was sobering, Leighton recalls, to realize that someone you "idolized . . . had very big feet of lots of clay."[80]

In retrospect, a record company seems like an almost inevitable next step for these devoted fans who had moved from listening to music, to marketing it, reviewing it and producing it in concert, albeit all on a very small scale. The start of Rounder Records is best understood if viewed, like all of the founders' other musical activities, as nothing more than a hobby, albeit one that, in Nowlin's words, "got out of control."[81] By 1970, with the great boom a thing of the past, there were few outlets for original recordings of the rural string band sounds that the Rounder founders wanted to hear. "Records that we were collecting ourselves became unavailable," said Nowlin, "and there was so much music we liked but couldn't" find on the market.[82] Using "bounce back" cards—postcards included with records through which companies solicit listener opinion—they offered recording suggestions to existing labels, with no response. Vanguard and Elektra, once the premier folk labels, had moved on to more profitable styles. The latter, though its roster still included some contemporary folk stars such as Tom Paxton and Tom Rush, had attained huge success with The Doors and the soft pop of Bread, in addition to experimenting with the proto-punk of The Stooges and the MC-5. Moe Asch's Folkways Records, though still grounded in eclectic, vernacular music, was noticeably less productive than just five years earlier.

There remained a number of specialized independents interested in non-commercial, tradition-based music, but their distribution was limited and their output depended heavily upon the idiosyncratic tastes of their owners. Sandy and Caroline

Paton's Folk-Legacy emphasized ballad singing. Chris Strachwitz, founder of California's Arhoolie Records, was interested predominantly in blues and, later, zydeco and the music of Mexico. Strachwitz started a companion label, Old Timey, to release the music that the Rounders loved, but it was not where his heart lay. In any event, the short-lived Old Timey, like Dave Freeman's County Records at the time, emphasized the reissue of older recordings. Rebel Records, located in the Washington, DC area, focused upon contemporary bluegrass and had had some success with The Country Gentlemen, a now widely respected band but one formerly charged with smoothing the rough edges of genuine mountain music. All of these labels were small and could offer only a few releases each year. Their founders usually performed most chores themselves. Strachwitz, for example, served as Arhoolie's "owner, recording engineer, bookkeeper, promoter and sometimes shipping clerk."[83] With time and money in perpetually short supply and without significant sales potential, many worthy possibilities went unreleased.

The Rounders wished, particularly, for a new release from The Lilly Brothers, still playing around Boston, though the Hillbilly Ranch was gone. The Lillys had last recorded commercially in 1964 for Prestige, a New York-based jazz label that made a relatively brief excursion into folk during the boom. By the end of the sixties its folk days were over and it had become a subsidiary of California–based Fantasy Records, another one-time jazz label that had attained rock and roll success with Creedence Clearwater Revival. Determined to see the Lillys back on record the fledgling label owners decided they would do the job themselves. They hoped to produce an album for the ages—a "classic" that would stand the test of time. Around 1970 the band scheduled a concert at Boston's John Hancock Hall and the Rounders arranged to record it. They did not

formulate any release plans and contemplated offering the tape to an established label. After securing permission from the band and the promoter they taped the show with borrowed equipment. Unfortunately, tragedy aborted their plans. Shortly before the concert Everett Lilly's son died in a motorcycle accident. Carrying the tradition of "the show must go on" to an extreme, the Lillys took the stage as scheduled. Their performance, however, had the feel of an intensely personal memorial service and the Rounders considered it unreleasable as a commercial product. "It was just so heavy," says Irwin. The repertoire "was 'We Shall Meet Again In Heaven' and, you know, all those kinds of songs and it was so personal and so that never happened." Still, they "had gotten the bug" and "we had decided that we wanted to start a company. No," he corrects himself, "we really didn't decide to start a company. We decided that we wanted to put out some records . . ."[84]

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[1] Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York: Scribner, 1964), Title Page.

[2] Paul Grein, "Toto Is The Big Story At The 25th Annual Grammy Awards," Billboard, 5 March 1983, 3, 66.

[3] Scott Billington, interview by author. Billington co-produced Alright Again! with Brown's manager Jim Bateman.

[4] Scott Billington, e-mail to author, January 25, 2005.

[5] Mark A. Humphrey, "Bright Lights, Big City: Urban Blues," in Nothing But The Blues: The Music And The Musicians, ed. Lawrence Cohn (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 175.

[6] Howard Mandel, "Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown: The Real Thing," Down Beat, September 1983, 23, 24.

[7] Paul Cantrell, "Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown," Down Beat, October 1984, 57.

[8] Mandel, " The Real Thing," 25.

[9] Dana Jennings, "A Regular Gig on the Far Side of Celebrity," New York Times (National ed.), January 11, 1998, AR 1, 42.

[10] Michele Chihara, Reeling at Rounder: Is Cambridge's pet indie label going corporate?" Boston Phoenix, 27 April 2000, online edition at <http://www.bostonphoenix.com/archive/features/00/04/27/rounder%5Frecords.html> (accessed 3 March 2005).

[11] Pete Welding, "George Thorogood And The Destroyers," Down Beat, 13 July 1978, 34.

[12] Ken Irwin (B), interview by author; Ken Irwin, e-mails to author, 2 August 2002.

[13] Theodore Irwin, Strange Passage (New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, Inc., 1935), 12.

[14] Ibid., 179

[15] Ibid., 315

[16] Irwin (B), interview by author; Irwin, e-mail to author, 2 August 2002.

[17] Christine Stansell, American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 240-241.

[18] Rita Irwin and Clementina Paolone, M.D., Practical Birth Control: A Guide to Medically Approved Methods for the Married (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1937), xii, xiii, 64. (Emphasis in original.)

[19] Irwin, e-mails to author, 4 October 2002 and 6 May 2004; Irwin (D), interview by Lara Pellegrinelli; John A. Jackson, Big Beat Heat: Alan Freed and the Early Years of Rock & Roll (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991).

[20] Irwin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[21] Irwin, e-mail to Lara Pellegrinelli, 19 March 1996.

[22] Irwin (B), interview by author.

[23] Quotations from Irwin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli. Other material from Irwin (A), interview by author. Irwin's first bluegrass album was The Greenbriar Boys, Vanguard Records VRS-9104 (released in 1960). Details on the band are from Neil V. Rosenberg, Bluegrass: A History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 146-148, 158.

[24] Bill Nowlin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[25] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[26] Nowlin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[29] Irwin, e-mail to Pellegrinelli, 17 April 1996.

[30] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[31] David Haney, "Hillbilly at Harvard," Bluegrass Unlimited, April 1988, 58. See also Beth Potier, "Hillbilly at Harvard Hosts Heady Hoedown Weekly," Harvard University Gazette, 10 January 2002, online edition at <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2002/01.10/14-hillbilly.html> (accessed 3 March 2005).

[32] Irwin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli; Nowlin (A), interview by author (on cliquishness).

[33] Nowlin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[34] Nowlin (A), interview by author; Irwin, e-mail to author, 15 May 2004 (describing his meeting with Odetta).

[35] Nowlin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[36] Nowlin (A), interview by author. See also Tony Trischka, "Ken Irwin and Rounder Records: 25 Years Of Bluegrass," Bluegrass Unlimited, July 1996, 16, 17.

[37] As to the Lillys and Hillbilly Ranch generally, in this and the following two paragraphs, see Sam Charters, "The Lilly Brothers of Hillbilly Ranch," Sing Out!, July 1965, 19-22; Sam Charters, liner notes to the audio recording The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover, The Prestige/Folklore Years, Volume Five: Have a Feast Here Tonight, Prestige/Folklore Records PRCD-9919-2 (reissued in 1999 by Fantasy, Inc.); Fred Pement, "Background/Recording Session," liner notes to the audio recording The Lilly Brothers And Don Stover, Live At Hillbilly Ranch, Hay Holler Records HH-CD-1333.

[38] Pement, "Background/Recording Session."

[39] Irwin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[40] Irwin e-mail to Pellegrinelli, April 2, 1996; Trischka, "Ken Irwin," 16, 17.

[41] Marshall Wyatt, "Every County Has Its Own Personality: An Interview With Dave Freeman," Old Time Herald, Winter 1999/2000, 12.

[42] Irwin e-mail to Pellegrinelli, April 2, 1996.

[43] Irwin e-mail to Pellegrinelli, July 16, 1996.

[44] Irwin, e-mail to author, August 26, 2002.

[45] Pat J. Ahrens, Union Grove: The First Fifty Years (Published privately by Pat J. Ahrens, 1975). On fiddling conventions generally, see Audrey A. Kaiman, "The Southern Fiddling Convention—A Study," Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin, March 1965, 7-16.

[46] Ken Irwin, "Union Grove long and peripheral," BGRASS-L, 29 December 2001.

[47] Nowlin (A), interview by author; Irwin quotations from Trischka, "Ken Irwin," 17-18; on Pegram's career see Steven Stolder, "George Pegram," in Music Hound/Folk: The Essential Album Guide, eds. Neil Walters and Brian Mansfield, 622-623 (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1998); and Bob Carlin, liner notes to the audio recording George Pegram, Rounder Records 0001.

[48] Trischka, "Ken Irwin," 18; Charles Wolfe, "Rounder Is 25! The Early Days of Rounder, Vol. 1," Old-Time Herald, Fall 1995, 35, 36; details of Kessinger's career from Kristin Baggelaar and Donald Milton, Folk Music: More Than A Song (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 211; on Kessinger at Union Grove, see Ahrens, Union Grove, 37.

[49] Alan Jabbour, interview by author.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Nowlin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Nowlin (B), interview by author.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid.

[57] Nowlin (B), interview by author; William Chapman, "55,000 Rally Against War; GI's Repel Pentagon Charge," Washington Post, October 22, 1967, A1; Jimmy Breslin, "Quiet Rally Turns Vicious," Washington Post, October 22, 1967, A1.

[58] Nowlin (B) interview by author; Nowlin e-mail to author, 26 August 2002.

[59] Irwin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli. During her marriage and for some time thereafter, Leighton used the name Marian Leighton Levy. Today she prefers to be known by her maiden name, Marian Leighton.

[60] Marian Leighton (C), interview by Pellegrinelli, for quotations. Leighton (A), interview by author.

[61] Leighton (C), interview by Pellegrinelli, for quotations. Leighton (A), interview by author.

[62] Leighton, e-mail to author, 3 September 2002.

[63] Leighton (B), interview by author; Leighton (C), interview by Pellegrinelli; Leighton, e-mail to author, 3 September 2002.

[64] Leighton (C), interview by Pellegrinelli; Irwin (B), interview by author.

[65] Leighton (B), interview by author.

[66] Leighton (C), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Leighton (A), interview by author.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Nowlin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[73] Leighton(B), interview by author.

[74] Irwin, e-mail to author, 2 August 2002.

[75] Irwin (B), interview with author; Leighton (B), interview with author.

[76] Leighton, e-mail to author, 4 September 2002; David Welsh, "Brothers of Passamaquodia," Ramparts, March 1967, 40, 42; Warren Hinckle, "A Social History of the Hippies," Ramparts, March 1967, 5, 9.

[77] William G. Nowlin, Jr., The Political Thought Of Alexander Berkman (Ph.D. Dissertation, Tufts University, 1980), 50, 72; Nowlin (B), interview by author; Leighton (B), interview by author.

[78] Leighton (C), interview by Pellegrinelli.

[79] Ibid.

[80]Leighton (A), interview by author.

[81] Nowlin(A), interview by author.

[82] Wolfe, "Rounder Is 25!", 36.

[83] Robert Carlin, "The Small Specialty Record Company in the United States," Pickin', August 1977, 16, 22. This article, at page 18, provides a comprehensive list of folk oriented independent labels in the United States in the mid-1970s.

[84] Irwin (D), interview by Pellegrinelli.

5

SURREALISTIC BANJOS AND RHYTHM & BLUES
Rounder's Broad Aesthetic

The Rounders' decision to "put out some records" led to the creation of a label that merged Folkways' vernacular eclecticism with Elektra's early commitment to contemporary revivalists. Over time Rounder's aesthetic combined the founders' idealized romance with rural traditions with the anarchic sense of freedom that they drew from the late sixties counter-culture. They added to this their recognition that even the oldest, most hidebound definitions of folk music always described a form of popular culture. Long before Henry Glassie characterized tradition as “the creation of the future out of the past,” Irwin, Nowlin and Leighton understood intuitively that people could simultaneously treasure their cultural traditions, enjoy the best that the commercial music world had to offer and sometimes merge the two in a hybrid of modern, yet tradition-oriented, music that is both entertaining and culturally specific. Drawn to the music of worlds other than their own, they accepted instinctively the cultural borrowing on which the revival thrives. The resulting label catalog, viewed as a whole, reveals this full spectrum of experiences and attitudes. In 1970, before they could dream of the shape this catalog would take, they condensed this spectrum into their new label name. Derived in part from the whimsical observation that records are round, the name also drew inspiration from the founders’ romantic yearnings and their wide ranging traditional, yet experimental, aesthetic.[1]

The image of the rounder in American culture is that of an eternal misfit—a recalcitrant ne'er-do-well who, literally and psychologically, traverses society's outer edges. In describing the plight of alcoholics in nineteenth-century New York City, Otto L. Bettman writes that they were typically confined to asylums, only to be released after a few days of abstinence. Then, he explains, "they often went on a new binge and, incarcerated once more, became known as rounders" due to the circular nature of their sad path. In 1907 songwriter Perry Bradford published a tune called "Jacksonville Rounder's Dance," only to rename it a dozen years later, explaining "people didn't like the title, because 'rounder' meant pimp." In his 1929 record "Rounder's Lament," vocalist Winston Holmes uses the term as a fairly all-encompassing pejorative. Bemoaning the fact that he has callously abandoned his decent and supportive woman, he sings "What a low, contemptible rounder I have been."[2] An extended representation of the shiftless rounder appears in the lyric to "Rising Sun Blues" as recorded by Clarence Ashley on Folkways in the early sixties. The song is also known as "The House of the Rising Sun" and, with variant lyrics, countless heroes of the great boom recorded it, including Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, Bob Dylan and British blues rockers The Animals, all favorites of one or more of the future label owners. Here is an excerpt from Ashley's rendition, recorded a few years before Irwin and Nowlin stamped his name all over the Tufts campus:

> Just fill the glass up to the brim
> Let the drinks go merrily around
> We'll drink to the life of a rounder, poor boy
> Who goes from town to town
> All in this world does a rounder want
> Is a suitcase and a trunk
> The only time he's satisfied

Is when he's on the drunk[3]

As applied to the new record label, the term is a fanciful expression of the anti-heroic, outlaw self-image of the three romantics who, dedicated to their own exploration of cultural margins, positioned themselves in opposition to capitalism, Puritanism and the programmatic rigidity of the old left. The trio drew the final source of their label name from the Holy Modal Rounders, a musical duo that Irwin and Nowlin first heard in the mid-sixties when they discovered the musicians performing on a Cambridge street, as part of a benefit for a local hospital. Peter Stampfel, the Holy Modal's fiddler and banjoist, began performing with guitarist Steve Weber in 1963 when they were in their mid-20s. Stampfel, who for 40 years has offered the more straightforward descriptions of his ongoing adventures with Weber, was born in 1938. His earliest musical heroes included both Pete Seeger and the black rhythm and blues artists who sampled pop music success in the fifties, people like Chuck Berry, Fats Domino and Little Richard. By 1959, however, as commercial pop began drifting toward the teen idol phase, Stampfel found that he had no use for Fabian and Paul Anka. He fortuitously discovered Harry Smith's Anthology around this time. "It devastated me," he recalls, "it totally wiped me out. Hearing all this amazing stuff, enthralled and captivated me and I decided that I had to recreate this music because all of the people who did it were dead or dying." With the enthusiasm of youth, he concluded "once they were gone, by God, if I didn't grab that torch, the flame would be extinguished forever! I needn't have bothered because thousands of other kids had the same response. So instead of it dying, there was a huge resurgence."[4]

Initially Stampfel was a self-described purist but he grew to hate the more-traditional-than-thou posturing he saw in some revival circles. "People would take an instrumental break and put this stone face on," he recalls, their expression saying, "'look at this stupendous thing that I'm doing.' There was a sense of pompous preening, not to mention the sanctimoniousness of the social stuff—'Sing what must be sung.' These people drove me nuts . . ."[5] He is equally dismissive of the sectarian old left, which could strip music of its joy in the service of an often-doctrinaire political agenda. One of his earliest ensembles—the Berkeley, California-based Lower Telegraph Avenue Freedom Fighters String Band—changed its name after Stampfel grew tired of explaining that it was not one more aggregation of dour propagandists. The group advocated freedom in an artistic sense that focused more on modes of expression than on political dogma and they did not want to be identified with what Stampfel called "freedom bullshit." Marking some distance from his early idol Seeger, he declared, "We weren't doing any 'If I Had A Hammer' shit."[6]

In 1964, when he and Weber released their debut album on Prestige, Stampfel was a self-described advocate of "progressive old-timey," an approach that stemmed from his perception of changing social conditions:

> If I were a banjo player of 60 years ago I would have played the music from my neighborhood. I would probably have never been more than a few hundred miles away from where I was born. All of everything that I knew about music would be what I learned from the people around me.
>
> Now it's different. My frame of reference is not my neighborhood or my hometown, but the whole world and all of history. There is this phenomenon called mass communication. It means that almost everyone today has heard more music than almost anyone 60 years ago.[7]

Stampfel found it impossible to honor the musicians on the Anthology by something as limited as strict replication or sober didacticism. The lyrics on that collection were frequently nonsensical; the delivery was bright and buoyant; the band names—The Skillet Lickers, The Fruit Jar Drinkers, The Jug Stompers—seemed absurdly tongue-in-cheek. In all of this, Stampfel saw wit and daring; he saw artistry; and he wanted to present old-time music as he believed the artists of the 1920s would have themselves presented it, had conditions been just a bit different. "What if Charlie Poole and Uncle Dave Macon and all those guys on the Anthology could be magically transported to the Sixties without aging at all, and then they heard rock 'n' roll? And that's been the basis of everything I've done since."[8] With this in mind, Stampfel did things like re-write the lyric to the classic "Hesitation Blues" in a presumably successful 1964 effort to be the first to record the word "psychedelic." ("I got the psychedelic blues, Tell me how long, Do I have to wait?") Dave Van Ronk declared the Holy Modal Rounders not merely "progressive" but representatives of the revival's "surrealist wing." Irwin remembers singing the band's song "Euphoria" at his father's home while he was still an undergraduate. Recalling the lyric that celebrated "floating around on a belladonna cloud," he says that at the time he did not have the "faintest idea" what it meant but he sensed his father "getting very concerned."[9]

A live recording from 1965 gives an indication of the duos' sound around the time Irwin and Nowlin discovered them. It illustrates the musicians' penchant for wicked irreverence, as they mocked the often overwrought seriousness with which some revivalists plumbed the history of every tune they performed, losing sight of a song's

function as art and entertainment. Introducing "Hold The Woodpile Down," a song recorded by early country star Uncle Dave Macon, Stampfel pronounces the original lyric "dumb." So, he explains, he jettisoned all but the "great" chorus, added some words written by his girlfriend and "then I swiped a little splinter fragment from William Blake, noted English madman of yore. So this is me, my girl, Blake and Uncle Dave Macon in a daisy chain of arcane influence." Before striking the first notes of "Sugar in the Gourd," a staple of the old-time fiddle repertoire, Stampfel constructs a fanciful lyrical backstory drawn from popular folklore and American history: "Once upon a time there was a gourd, and the gourd was full of sugar and then Johnny Appleseed and George Washington and Benedict Arnold were walking along hand in hand picking violets one day and they said, 'Behold that gourd, full of sugar. Let's write a song about it.' And they did." At the dawn of their own romance with early country music, Irwin and Nowlin fell in love with the sound of the Holy Modal Rounders, a band that mirrored the duos' own whimsical side. The label founders, who would later transform their personal reverence for Clarence Ashley into a bit of absurdist street theatre, had discovered an old-time revival band that brought that same sense of avant-garde theatricality to the very idea of old-time revivalism.[10]

The two sets of Rounders met after the label became a going concern. Noticing graffiti that read "Put the Rounders on Rounder," Stampfel discovered the company after some brief inquiries and the label released several records by the band in the 1970s. Irwin made the initial overture. He approached Stampfel after a gig at which the artist had sought lodging through a pointed rendition of a tune recorded in 1925 by Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, "Can I Sleep In Your Barn Tonight, Mister?" ("May I

sleep in your barn tonight, Mister; It's cold lying out on the ground; And the cold north wind is whistling; And I have no place to lie down.") Invited to spend the night at the label owners' combination home, office and warehouse, the music fans grew close over their shared love, not of old-time music but of musical eclecticism. Stampfel was delighted to discover "piles of records all over every flat surface." He was "extremely impressed" by a wall poster advertising Nolan Strong and The Diablos, a black rhythm and blues group from Detroit that enjoyed minor success in the fifties with "The Wind." To Stampfel the tune was "one of the most strange and lovely rhythm and blues singles of all time." He was astonished to learn that the Rounder founders not only enjoyed The Diablos—an outgrowth of Irwin's early devotion to doo-wop—but also distributed two of its albums on behalf of Detroit's tiny Fortune Records. To the musician the poster was "a talisman," signaling a bond between the two groups. When he took his leave he carried with him not only the poster but also copies of the two Diablos' albums, gifts from his long-time admirers.[11]

From the beginning, though music served as Irwin's prime motivation, Nowlin and Leighton linked their efforts to those of earlier leftists who promoted the artistry of an idealized "people," as part of a political agenda in opposition to the capitalist mass media. In Nowlin's mind, work at Rounder became "a surrogate [political] activity, working with people's music and having a part of it be explicitly political in terms of content but knowing that the other stuff was also political in the sense—as it still is—of working with minority cultures and music that's outside the mainstream." The company expressed its principles in the following statement, which appeared on liner notes in the early and mid-seventies:[12]

> Rounder Records is an anti-profit collective that produces records and concerts and distributes other very small record labels. It is dedicated to remaining an anti-profit service group to make available important traditions of American culture that are largely non-commercial: traditional American string band and bluegrass music, black country blues and string band music, and protest music both past and present.
>
> Our form of work organization is worker-controlled, with no bosses, and with all finances in common. All money received from records sold is re-used to make future records. We envision our function as that of a service organization, an alternative to commercial record companies with implications of this alternate structure to continue serving people's culture ethically and in an anti-profit mode in the new world we all are working toward.[13]

In addition to advancing the cause of this so-called "people's music," the founders' two simultaneous initial releases reflect both their southern and Boston experiences—that interchange between revivalists and indigenous vernacular musicians characteristic of the more participatory folk boom activists. The immediate seeds of George Pegram, released as Rounder #0001, lay in a trip Irwin and Leighton took to Mardi Gras in the late sixties.[14] Before heading home they decided to visit Ken Davidson, the Kanawha Records owner who had introduced Irwin to fiddler Clark Kessinger a few years earlier. Davidson played them a tape recorded by his occasional collaborator Charles Faurot, consisting of Pegram singing old-time tunes and hymns and playing banjo, along with fiddle, mandolin and guitar accompaniment. He had hoped to release the recording but his label was near financial collapse. With Leighton and Nowlin's support, Irwin bought it from Faurot for $125.00 and the trio decided to release it themselves. Pegram had a long but peripheral career in the music industry. Born in 1911, he was "discovered" in the late 1940s by avocational folksong collector Bascom Lamar Lunsford who promoted him at southern folk festivals. A 1948 review describes him as "a natural clown, with an excellent

repertory of banjo songs and solo dance numbers, and with an inexhaustible fund of showmanship . . ."[15] In addition to festivals he played local dances, competed in old time music contests and made radio appearances. He also did a small amount of recording. In 1957 he and harmonica player Red Parham appeared on Pickin' and Blowin', an album released by Riverside Records.

By the late sixties the banjo player had, in Nowlin's recollection, several missing teeth and a crazy laugh. Used to playing without amplification, he sang with incredible volume. With a look and sound that appeared eccentric to the young Northerners and a repertoire of old songs, Pegram seemed a "weird character" who "fit all the stereotypes," which combined to make him "exciting" and "romantic."[16] In 1969 the Union Grove judges named Pegram the World Champion banjoist. Shortly thereafter, journalist Carson Taylor reviewed a Pegram performance in Salem, North Carolina, illustrating the artist in the era when the Rounders found him. Describing Pegram opening with the old ballad "John Henry," Taylor depicts a showman who rivaled Little Richard in intensity:

> . . . he laid into the famous folksong. Before he had finished half a stanza, the audience went wild. That spurred George to higher and higher clouds. He closed his eyes and sang, bending to an almost kneeling position. He wrung from the ballad all the emotion it is capable of exciting. You could almost see John Henry swing the hammer; almost hear the hammer strike steel. In a trice, George ceased to be banjoist and folk singer and became comedian. As always, he nodded like a Tennessee walking horse while playing. Stretching to tiptoe, he held the banjo's staff vertically, his fingers flying only inches from the microphone. The response from the audience almost drowned out the amplified sound of George's banjo.[17]

Though the Rounders now owned the Pegram tape, they needed a contract with the musician to release a commercial recording. To this day, Nowlin does not know if

Pegram saw them as the hobbyists they were or considered them akin to RCA or some other major label. He seemed pleased by the interest, since it had been so long since anyone had recorded him commercially. The Rounders retained an attorney to draw up a one-half page agreement in return for two copies each of the first two recordings. The contract, which Pegram signed on August 14, 1970, promised a royalty of 25 cents per record for the first 500 records sold and 50 cents per record for each additional copy sold. Royalties were payable whenever sales reached an increment of 100 copies. Irwin, through Rounder Records, was entitled to market the Pegram release for "as long as he desires."[18]

The three friends also pursued their label dreams with The Spark Gap Wonder Boys, a youthful old-time revival trio based in Boston consisting of George Nelson on vocals and guitar plus Dave Doubilet and Neil Rossi who both sang and, collectively, played banjo, guitar, fiddle, mandolin, harmonica and autoharp. Rossi, as I mentioned earlier, had performed folk music in the style of the Kingston Trio until a chance teenage encounter with country music on the radio left him a diehard bluegrass and old-time fan. While Stampfel and Weber pursued their surrealist approach, Spark Gap sought stricter fidelity to the sound of early country records. The group formed in 1966 and dubbed itself Dr. Doubilet and the Park Street Undertakers, a jocular reference to "Park Street Under," a local colloquialism for a subway stop. Formed too late to benefit fully from the folk boom, it was a part time affair, performing early country music two to three times per month on-campus coffeehouses in the Boston area. In 1968 the band made the pilgrimage to Union Grove. They became the Spark Gap Wonder Boys on a whim just before registering for the competition, after deciding that their morbid Park Street pun

would not go over well outside Boston. Nelson was an automobile mechanic, hence the term "spark gap." Rossi still chuckles over the elderly woman who took their application while saying something like, "Oh, Spark Gap! I've got relatives who live up there." The group was third-runner-up that year in the best old-time band category and Nelson's guitar playing earned several individual ribbons. Perhaps the biggest prize of all was a one-sentence mention in Newsweek that highlighted the distinctiveness of their Northern origin.[19] In 1970, their third consecutive year at Union Grove, they were named the world champion old-time band. That led to an overture from Irwin and Nowlin. Demonstrating both initiative and naiveté, they approached timidly, worried that more established labels would be competing for the services of this world beating aggregation. Rossi laughs, "We knew we weren't going to get recorded by anybody else. There wasn't anybody else. People like Elektra and Vanguard and all of the other folk labels had gone on to do other things and they were really only interested in making money and I can't blame them for that. So they weren't going to be pushing a part time group from Boston."[20]

Irwin and Nowlin "were quite up front," says Rossi. "They had no money. They had no experience. All they had was an interest in the music and a love for it. We had talked at some length about what they wanted to do and how they wanted to approach the music. It was clear that they had a great deal of respect [for] and knowledge about the music." Pegram excited the Rounders because of the aura of authenticity created by his southern origins and long musical history. Spark Gap excited them for a different reason. "We want to record somebody new," Rossi recalls them saying, "because we want to preserve the music. This is a good place to start." They recorded the album, eventually entitled Cluck Old Hen, during several sessions at the Harvard and MIT radio stations,

where friends had access to free equipment at off hours. The Rounders had little involvement in the studio. Spark Gap arranged the tunes and made all decisions regarding volume levels, sound balance and song sequence. The band requested no advance. Nor did those who helped out in the studio or worked on graphics request any payment.[21] The three Rounders did front the entire recording budget of approximately $7.00 for two reels of tape. After also paying for disc pressing and packaging, funded in part by $1000.00 of Irwin's savings, the "label" took delivery of 500 copies each of its first two albums. Its three owners had no distribution arrangement in place and no understanding of how record distribution worked. They had neither ads nor an ad budget. All they had was a belief in their music, a willingness to work and two LPs of archaic old-time tunes performed by musicians who for all practical purposes were total unknowns. It was October 20, 1970 and Rounder Records was born.[22]

Utilizing one of the few outlets available to them for free publicity, the Rounders submitted their debut albums to Bluegrass Unlimited for review. The reviewer, Richard Spottswood, a Washington, DC area radio host and avid collector of rare 78-rpm discs, liked both records but understood the fundamental distinction at their core. Pegram, he noted, was "an older North Carolina pre-Scruggs banjo man . . . [and] a great artist in the primitive style." Applauding the instrumental virtuosity, Spottswood called this "an especially good album for anyone wishing to trace historical banjo styles [though] its appeal will be limited for others." He judged The Spark Gap Wonder Boys by a standard that took explicit account of their role as urban revivalists, introducing his comments by writing, "Here's another group of city folks trying to play old-time pre-grass music." Spottswood, a known "proselytizer for ethnic and traditional music," confessed that he

usually found such "imitations" wanting but he recommended the record, finding it a welcome exception to the usual revival fare. Shining through his favorable remarks, however, stood his preference for musicians who grew up with the music they played. "They are very good," he wrote of Spark Gap, "and know how to play effectively in a number of styles. Their singing is not so good—but then city singers in this genre rarely are and they seem well aware of their shortcomings." Spottswood failed to elaborate on either the group's shortcomings or the basis for its presumed self-awareness but his preference for more "authentic" rural traditionalists was clear.[23]

Rounder debuted within a month of the drug related deaths of both Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, symbolic events suggesting the dangers of the star system and rock and roll excess. Rolling Stone placed these deceased icons on two successive covers but, in unrelated articles appearing that month, it also looked fondly at the remnants of the great boom. One piece detailed a recent Hollywood concert celebrating Woody Guthrie, which served to raise funds to combat Huntington's Chorea, the disease that had ended the performer's life. In then-contemporary folk terms, it was a star-studded event that drew 18,000 fans to the Hollywood Bowl to hear Guthrie's son Arlo, as well as Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Country Joe McDonald, Richie Havens, Odetta and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. In a poignant observation, Millard Lampell, once a member of the long-gone Almanac Singers, commented on the promise of the boom and the circumstances surrounding its demise:

> What's happening tonight is more like the old days when everybody sang together. Nobody can afford to put all these people together on one stage because they're all worth thousands and thousands of dollars—everybody's got a piece of their asses. So

> it's gotta be for nothing to get them all on stage, and it's also gotta be something they all believe in.[24]

A second article offered a glowing look at the recently concluded Ninth Annual Philadelphia Folk Festival under the headline "Philly Folkies' Community Vibes." Using mimicry that managed to sound somewhat more loving than the dismissive caricatures that had once appeared in Time, the magazine exalted the festival's focus on the "straight natchal blues, straight natchal bluegrass, and straight natchal grass-roots music . . ." Eschewing both rock and roll and the revival stars who honored Guthrie in Hollywood, Philadelphia's biggest attractions were bluesman Luther Allison and the contemporary British revivalists Fairport Convention, whose electrified versions of traditional tunes drove the crowd to furious jigs and Morris dancing. Though both performed at high volume, neither was a huge star and their sound was steeped in vernacular tradition. Doc Watson, bluegrassers Ola Belle Reed and Ralph Stanley, the political Utah Phillips and the contemporary sounds of Happy Traum and his brother Artie helped fill out the schedule. The dominant Philadelphia "vibe," however, came from the audience. "Banjos, fiddles, jews harps, dulcimers, guitars and clanging beer cans provided 24-hour music for cooking, smoking, balling and sleeping. Community and relaxation were the prevailing moods of the festival . . ." Two weeks later, Rolling Stone carried an ad for the Traum brothers' new major-label release. Against a backdrop that pictured the brothers, then residents of New York State's Catskill Mountain region, surrounded by trees, acoustic guitars in hand, the ad explained that "after living in the mountains for a few years one begins to understand the stuff that ballads and lore are made of . . ." [25]

All of this suggests a residue of commercial promise in folk music revivalism, at least for a select few performers. Much of Rounder's growth would stem from this still romantic yearning for the return of folk's commercial glory and for the bygone days it idealized. Yet a significant part of the label's appeal, particularly over time, grew from the more straightforward desire of vernacular music adherents for an increased commercial presence. In the month of Rounder's birth, while Rolling Stone lovingly examined lingering vestiges of the great boom, Billboard, the industry's unabashed commercial chronicler, focused upon the sorry state of the country music industry, foreshadowing an alternative source of Rounder's eventual strength. Timed to coincide with the forty-fifth anniversary of the Grand Ole Opry, the magazine presented a special section entitled the "World of Country Music." Paul W. Soelberg, a principal in a country artist management firm, examined the problems posed by country's commercial growing pains. Soelberg targeted country music radio, an industry unto itself that had exploded in size in the mid-sixties. As he saw it, this burgeoning format was populated by an excessive number of disc jockeys, program directors and station owners who were not only wholly ignorant of country music's storied past, but also possessed of an outright antagonism toward the form. Intent upon "modernizing" the music in search of that always elusive mass market, these programmers—like others before them—fled the hillbilly image en masse as they experimented with an ongoing series of marketing terms such as "metropolitan country" or "countrypolitan," designed to demonstrate that country music had arrived uptown.[26]

The practical problem of which Soelberg complained was that these marketeers ignored older artists and styles, and the fans who still loved them. Uninterested in early

forms of country music, they presumed that it did not interest their listeners, at least in significant numbers. Disclaiming any responsibility to either appeal to specialty audiences or to educate listeners about country music's wide range, they focused on a narrow band of sound-alike music that they believed would sell to the largest number of consumers. As Soelberg writes:

> This pattern eventually exerted a tremendous influence on the creation of product. Many persons, fans and industry professionals, deplored the fact that the 'guts' were being ripped out of the music.
>
> Creators became uncomfortably aware of the new tight 'formats' and the tendency to select for air exposure a narrowing spectrum of new product. Artists formerly reigning supreme dropped from the air; others briefly extended their lives by adding strings or brass. Entire county music sub-categories such as country gospel, western swing, or bluegrass, were judged by many new programmers as 'inappropriate' and were summarily eliminated from programming.[27]

In October 1971, exactly one year after its debut, Rounder released three additional records. In their fidelity to commercially outmoded musical forms, each album appeared directly responsive to Soelberg's concerns. The banjo and fiddle duo of Snuffy Jenkins and Pappy Sherrill recorded 33 Years of Pickin' and Pluckin', which demonstrated that a well-made album could still provide a measure of professional opportunity for country artists performing older commercial styles. DeWitt "Snuffy" Jenkins and Homer "Pappy" Sherrill, born in 1908 and 1915, respectively, were old-time players from the Carolinas who were commercial veterans by the time of their association with Rounder. Both began their careers in the mid-thirties working the medicine-show circuit, in which country stars toured on behalf of the manufacturers of non-prescription "home remedies." Such performances typically featured dance and comedy skits as well

as music. Jenkins, a skilled comedian, often wore make-up and exaggerated dress as part of his shows. Separately and together they began recording in 1940. By the end of the fifties they had placed dozens of tunes on commercial recordings.[28]

Among aficionados Jenkins was known as one source of the distinctive three-finger banjo picking style made famous by Earl Scruggs during his late forties tenure with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys. Replacing the strumming and two-finger picking heard on earlier country records, three-finger style made possible the rapid fire runs of single notes that gave the developing—and still unnamed—style of bluegrass its distinctive sound. It is a style so identified with Scruggs, its best known exponent, that it is often named for him, but Jenkins and others helped develop it. The technique arose organically in the region of North Carolina where both Jenkins and Scruggs grew up as local performers strived to innovate and improve. Jenkins, Scruggs' elder by 16 years, learned it traditionally by watching and hearing musicians in his community. "So I heard those fellas playing and that kind of stuck with me a little bit," he said, "and I picked it up from them. I don't claim I started the three-finger style. The only thing I claim is that I was about the first one to go on the air in that part of the country with it." Country music historian Bill Malone confirms that, through his radio work in the late thirties, Jenkins "became the first five-string banjoist to popularize the three-finger roll before a large audience. Many young musicians listened in awe to Jenkins' syncopated sound; two of them, Don Reno [another influential bluegrass banjoist] and Earl Scruggs would later introduce it to the world." In the words of banjo master Tony Trischka, Jenkins "became the man to take the three finger style to the doorstep of bluegrass."[29]

By the late fifties Jenkins' and Sherrill's careers had wound down as their brand of old-time music and rural comedy fell out of commercial favor. Despite recording for Folkways and the small Folk-Lyric label in the fifties and sixties, they never developed a large revival following. By the early sixties, they performed only occasionally. They earned their livings selling cars at a Columbia, South Carolina, Chevrolet dealership. It was there, in 1965, that Pat Ahrens, a banjo enthusiast and freelance writer, introduced herself to Jenkins. Later, while researching a book on the history of the Union Grove Fiddlers' Convention, Ahrens discovered photographs of the event taken by Nowlin, in the possession of Convention organizers. Wanting to use the photos in her book, she began a correspondence with Nowlin, which led to Jenkins' and Sherrill's Rounder debut. The Rounders traveled to Columbia in June 1971 for the two recording sessions needed to make the album. They stayed at Ahrens' home and for the first time rented a professional studio, which came with the services of its resident engineer. Jenkins and Sherrill were very excited about the project and the relaxed sessions displayed their virtuosity in a variety of early country music styles, from pre-bluegrass banjo picking to swing-tinged fiddling. "I think they were very proud [of the record]," says Ahrens, "and I think it helped revive their careers."[30]

At the time Rounder lacked meaningful commercial distribution but with Ahrens' help the newly energized musicians used the album as a calling card, alerting specialized promoters to their continued viability. Crazy Water Barn Dance, a follow-up Rounder album released in March 1976, aided this renewal. Close to home, the two played for schoolchildren and for shut-ins at hospitals and nursing homes, while their new records provided entree to southern bluegrass festivals as well as to ongoing revival venues, such

as the Philadelphia and University of Chicago folk festivals. In these latter arenas audiences saw them as exemplars of an era that had passed—vibrant and entertaining, but gone. The musicians helped foster this image through several high-profile appearances that cast them as exotic museum pieces. In 1976 they appeared with the Joffrey Ballet for four performances of "Country Dance," choreographed by Twyla Tharp. In 1983, they played a central role in a medicine show revival staged at New York's American Place Theatre. Two years later, they took the stage of Carnegie Hall as part of a retrospective entitled "Southern Mountain Music." Ironically, though the great boom of the sixties passed Jenkins and Sherrill by, they thrived in the ongoing revival of the seventies and beyond, a scene that Rounder helped nurture through an increasingly steady stream of releases.[31]

Rounder also, in 1971, took its first steps into bluegrass, the revival staple that would form a major part of the label's catalog. Bluegrass rests upon the foundation of old-time country music, which derives from the folk ballads and dance tunes with which people entertained themselves in the early years of the twentieth century. The New Lost City Ramblers and many others brought old-time music to revival stages, but the music's boom-era cachet arose from its identity as a survival of pre-industrial social music. Bluegrass, by contrast, was born as a commercial form in the 1940s through the innovations of Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys. Monroe, known today as the father of bluegrass, began performing on the commercial country music circuit in the 1920s. By the late 1940s he had honed the relatively casual old-time style into a then revolutionary ensemble sound. Mayne Smith, who published what is probably the earliest scholarly article on bluegrass, describes it as "more formalized and jazz-like than that encountered

in earlier string band styles." The old-time staples of banjo, fiddle and mandolin play within "well defined roles," which shifted pursuant to "predictable patterns." Scruggs' inventive banjo picking helped define and popularize the sound, as did a tense, high-pitched, nasal—and male—vocal delivery. Revivalists began performing bluegrass in the mid-1950s, drawn to its old-time roots and—from the perspective of urban elites—its archaic southern sound, elements that combined to make it seem "traditional." Alan Lomax introduced it to a broader urban audience through a 1959 Esquire article in which he called it "folk music with overdrive."[32]

Rounder's initial foray into bluegrass was One Morning in May by Joe Val and the New England Bluegrass Boys. Val (nee Joe Valiante) was a Massachusetts native born in 1926 who worked as a typewriter repairman when not playing music. A mandolinist and high tenor singer, Val stood apart from a strict dichotomy between boom-influenced revivalists and so-called southern authentics. A generation older than the young music lovers who fueled the boom, his path to bluegrass came not through the revival but through his ardent love for early country music. He was in his 20s when he first heard Bill Monroe and by the early 1950s he was performing with the Radio Rangers who played on the Hayloft Jamboree, a Boston-based country radio show that died before the revival peaked. He was influenced deeply by the Lilly Brothers, Don Stover and Tex Logan, meeting them shortly after they moved to Boston and sometimes performing with them at Hillbilly Ranch. During the revival, Val moved freely across boundaries, playing comfortably with younger folk-influenced musicians and performing frequently at Club 47. In the mid-sixties he joined the Charles River Valley Boys, mainstays of the Cambridge scene, perhaps most widely known today among folk aficionados for Beatle

Country, a collection of bluegrass renditions of Beatle tunes that Elektra released in 1966.[33]

For his Rounder debut Val and guitarist Herb Applin focused on the close harmony vocal duets that marked the formative days of bluegrass. In an early example of Rounder's often detailed, historically oriented liner notes, the label offered a musical context for the collection. Today these notes seem almost painfully simplistic, but they reflect the still ongoing education of Rounder's owners, who were earnestly grappling with the desire to spread the good word about the music they loved:

> The music of the New England Bluegrass Boy is early bluegrass. What we now know as bluegrass music is a specified style of country music which developed under the influence of Bill Monroe . . . There is a very large segment of today's bluegrass audience who have never really been very well exposed to early bluegrass music, as made by the Monroe Brothers before Bill Monroe went out on his own.[34]

Bluegrass Unlimited called the album "a pleasant surprise" and "a delightful set," noting that "most importantly, it is a cardinal illustration of the direction bluegrass can take, far removed of the demands of Nashville and it's [sic] blind commercialism . . . If the old time bluegrass sound is your bag, then you won't want to be without this one." Ignoring distinctions posed by geographic region or labels such as "city singers," "revivalist" or "traditionalist," Rounder scored an artistic triumph. The label issued four more albums by Joe Val and the New England Bluegrass Boys—Val's only albums as a bandleader—before the musician's premature death from cancer in 1985. Demonstrating how even a small label could help create a personal and regional legacy, these albums helped Val solidify his reputation as a New England bluegrass pioneer. Today, in part because of Rounder, he is known widely among serious bluegrass fans and memorialized

annually at The Joe Val Bluegrass Festival, presented since 1986 by the Boston Bluegrass Union.[35]

Rounder's remaining 1971 album, 14 Bluegrass Instrumentals, was by Country Cooking, a group of young northerners fueled by the twin banjos of Pete Wernick and Tony Trischka. Country Cooking, like the Spark Gap Wonder Boys, consisted of the founders' cultural and generational peers. Trischka was born in 1949 and grew up in Syracuse, New York. As a child he took flute and piano lessons before moving to the guitar. At 14 his life and his primary instrument changed when he heard Dave Guard play the banjo on a Kingston Trio recording. He later embraced the music of Earl Scruggs, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Cream and the jazz fusion of Weather Report and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra.[36] Wernick, a New York City native born in 1946, grew up in the The Bronx. He was also drawn to the Kingston Trio, which he calls a "major influence." He became a regular at the Sunday afternoon jams in Washington Square Park and, as a Columbia University student in the mid-1960s, he hosted the only New York area radio show devoted exclusively to bluegrass. As a northern urbanite who loved bluegrass, he pondered his place within the folk revival's culture wars. In a 1967 letter to Bluegrass Unlimited he condemned those who approached the music "as intellectuals," a stance that prompted either "a condescending attitude or glaring incongruencies such as references to Paganini or Truffaut in the liner notes on bluegrass albums . . ." The "best way out," he concluded" was to "forget your damned cultural frame of reference and listen to the music." People, he argued, "are not so different from one to the next. . ."[37]

In 1971 Trischka was a student at Syracuse University where his father taught. Wernick, then a doctoral candidate in Sociology at Columbia, worked at the Cornell International Population Program in Ithaca. After meeting along the upstate New York musician's circuit the two began performing together in the Contraband Countryband. Nondi Leonard, Wernick's wife, was the lead singer. The Contraband soon crossed paths with Irwin and Leighton and the band performed at the first concert staged by the Ithaca Friends of Bluegrass. In addition to sharing the Rounder's musical interests, Wernick—notwithstanding his earlier insistence that music lovers should forgo their cultural frame of reference—appreciated their cultural politics. He remembers their mutual stance with wry insight.

> Those were highly politicized days and [the Rounders] actually came at it as though this was part of their political statement; that they were going to glorify . . . back then the phrase was 'the people,' . . . 'power to the people,'. . . 'the people' were the heroes, and us collegiate people were sort of the guilty children of the people who had exploited 'the people.' And everybody was of the mind to try to get back with 'the people,' to help 'the people' have some ascendancy, and cultural ascendancy was something everybody believed in very easily.[38]

The Contraband, which soon changed its name to Country Cooking, was a quasi-bluegrass, quasi-country ensemble that emphasized Leonard's vocals and played what Wernick terms "good time bluegrass" that was more "collegiate entertainment" than art. Envisioning something of greater musical depth, he and Trischka wanted to explore the use of complementary twin banjos in bluegrass, something that no one was doing on record at the time and that few had ever done. The Rounders were delighted to put out such an innovative record. Using the best available players, the resulting disc contained a line-up that differed from the performing band. There was no written contract and no

discussion of the ownership of the disc's several original compositions, which reflected the casual way in which all involved conducted business. There was simply an oral agreement that the band members would split a fifty-cent per record royalty assuming anyone bought the disc. "It was really just hippies," says Wernick, who saw the album initially as something they would offer their friends. Real records came from established companies like RCA or, at the least, Folkways; they were not recorded at the Cornell Student Union by a group of students and their friends. Despite a recording session so informal that it bordered on the amateurish, his attitude began to change fairly quickly. As the group members passed around headphones to listen to the tape playback they became giddy with delight, realizing that this indeed sounded like a record.[39]

Though noting the album's myriad engineering deficiencies, Bluegrass Unlimited praised its musical qualities, calling it "as good an instrumental bluegrass recording as one is apt to find anywhere." Wernick, who previously assumed he would pursue an academic career as a sociologist, now glimpsed the possibility of life as a professional musician. Country Cooking began touring more aggressively, hampered by the fact that the stage band still differed from that found on the record. They funded a second album themselves, this time using a sixteen-track professional studio. The success of the song "Dueling Banjos" from the soundtrack to the film "Deliverance" had seemingly made the banjo a hot commercial commodity, at least for the moment. Wernick assumed he could capitalize successfully on that phenomenon and shopped the sophomore album to major labels. He hoped for money and promotional support that Rounder was in no position to offer. He was stunned when he found no one interested. Label executives considered "Dueling Banjos" a fluke—a novelty number that attracted attention because of the

"dueling," not because of the banjo. Wernick eventually offered the project to the Rounders, who were happy to release it despite some tension stemming from the band's aspirations.[40]

Barrel of Fun, Country Cooking's second Rounder release, came out in January 1974. While the first album consisted of well-played but conventional bluegrass, the second was broadly experimental. Though bluegrass basics held it together, the album offered more of the stylistic variety characteristic of the band's live act, including two cuts featuring Nondi Leonard's vocals, which were not well suited to the traditional bluegrass sound. The otherwise all-instrumental record featured, in small doses, steel guitar, piano, saxophone and even a synthesizer. On his original tour de force, "Kentucky Bullfight," Trischka played his banjo with a drive akin to the lead guitarist in a rock band. Wernick jokes that after the relative—in bluegrass terms—success of the first record, it was as if the band told the bluegrass world "now that we've got your attention, we're going to abuse it." In a nonetheless positive review, Bluegrass Unlimited argued that the record achieved a successful resolution of the dilemma supposedly faced by the urban northern bluegrass band. Unable to master the genre's distinctive vocal demands, that band must either remain content to play traditional bluegrass for self-satisfaction or must distill what it can from that traditional mode and use it to "create something different and unique." The magazine called the record a successful example of "abstract bluegrass" and concluded that Country Cooking had mastered the latter approach.[41]

Wernick terms the album a bit of a "hodge-podge," though he remains intensely proud of its musicianship and genre bending. He attributes its experimental flavor to the band's immersion in the counterculture. We had, he says, "seriously long hair and the

looser attitudes that went with that." On the record jacket, in lieu of the formal, often dour poses struck by many bluegrassers, Country Cooking posed in a chorus line with their legs kicked high in the air. Older southern fans looking at that cover might think "Oh no, an invasion of the freaks." The band took that image to the stages of southern festivals with generally positive results. A few people dismissed them but they found acceptance as well. Wernick encountered plenty of southern hippies plus quite a few seemingly conservative musicians who, ignoring cultural differences as Wernick had once urged, just wanted to jam. The band's single greatest validation came unexpectedly from Bill Monroe, the taciturn, often stern and sometimes scary bluegrass patriarch who exemplified that which partisans considered traditional in the form. At the First Annual Delaware Bluegrass Festival in September 1972 the promoter warned the bandmembers that headliner Monroe would not even look at them. After the band left the stage, however, Monroe approached. Directing himself to guitarist Russ Barenberg he urged, "Boys, always keep looking for them new notes."[42]

With Country Cooking, the fledgling Rounder helped expand the artistic parameters of bluegrass while simultaneously building bridges between conservative traditionalists and experimental innovators. It also helped launch long running and influential professional careers. Most members of the band have recorded their own albums and have acquired lengthy artistic resumes. Musicians recognize Trischka as a major influence on progressive banjo players. A respected teacher, he has recorded a string of albums—for Rounder and other labels—that apply the instrument to music ranging from hard bluegrass to free-form jazz. Wernick spent twelve years with Hot Rize, one of the most popular bluegrass bands of the 1980s. He served 15 years as President of

the Board of Directors of the IBMA. With Nondi Leonard, he runs a successful series of music instruction camps in Colorado. Bluegrass Banjo, the instruction manual he published in 1974, has sold over 100,000 copies and was the first of his several books. Though he never became a professional sociologist, he did earn his Ph.D. from Columbia and bluegrassers around the world know him as Dr. Banjo.

Rounder went on to explore every point along a steadily widening bluegrass spectrum ranging from the most traditional to the most innovative. The founders are proudest of their efforts to bring women to the genre's forefront. Beginning with West Virginia's Hazel Dickens in 1973, through Laurie Lewis, Lynn Morris, Claire Lynch, Rhonda Vincent and Alison Krauss, the label has arguably done more than any other to legitimize the role of women as bluegrass bandleaders. Krauss, a singer and fiddler who began recording for Rounder in 1987 at age 16, is the label's only million-seller. In 1988 Bluegrass Unlimited called her band "traditional, progressive and original." Her beautiful soprano and easy mixture of bluegrass, commercial country music and pop have helped her cross over to mainstream audiences, which has brought her success and ensured a measure of controversy. Rigid traditionalists sometimes voice resentment of her pop inflections. She stills some potential critics, however, because she and her band can expertly perform straightforward traditional bluegrass whenever they choose, and they present such material for at least a portion of every album and performance. By embracing the spectrum, Krauss presents bluegrass to fans who would never hear it otherwise.[43]

Rounder's initial efforts from 1970 and 1971 appeared, on the surface, to have a narrow focus. Each rested on a foundation of southern old-time music and its most direct

descendant, bluegrass, and each emphasized the string band staples of banjo, fiddle, guitar and mandolin. Taken as a whole, however, they provide an early indication of the label's eventual stylistic breadth. Pegram, Jenkins and Sherrill exemplified the romanticized authentic, a construct that by the 1970s overshadowed their commercial backgrounds. Each claimed a regional connection to his style, which he learned in a more or less "traditional" manner—through direct observation of the often informal playing of others within his community. Their Rounder releases traded heavily on their cachet as exemplars of the past. Joe Val was not a southern authentic. His artistry did, however, reflect the products of the early country music industry, which traveled northward as southerners migrated and, through radio and live performance, spread southern sounds beyond their origin. Though this phenomenon also inspired Neil Rossi of the Spark Gap Wonder Boys, his initial exposure to southern folk tunes came through the revival products of the Kingston Trio. Those polished sounds remained a point of reference for Rossi who looked backward consciously in search of his authentic ideal. The members of Country Cooking also came to southern string band music through the commercial products of the great boom. Unlike Spark Gap, they brought that music forward, blending bluegrass with other influences. All of these musicians benefited artistically and professionally from the social and economic structures created or nurtured by the boom, as did Rounder itself.

Fairly rapidly the new label sought to establish itself within the revival's varied musical streams. For the balance of this chapter I will illustrate this by selective examples. I do not intend to encompass the totality of Rounder's variety. Instead I hope to provide a sense of the label's effort to maintain and broaden the cultural reach of the great

boom. From its inception Rounder assigned four-digit catalog numbers to its albums, primarily because that was similar to what other record companies did. Pegram was Rounder 0001, Spark Gap was Rounder 0002 and so on. As Rounder began to issue different types of material the founders decided to emulate Folkways and separate them into distinct numerical series. The earliest releases had consisted of new recordings of old-time music or bluegrass performed by musicians who were then currently active. That broadly delineated approach became the hallmark of the "zero series." The founders dedicated the 1000 series to reissues of older material previously released by other record companies. The 2000 series is devoted to the work of African-Americans. The founders worried about the "racial segregation" inherent in this division. There were, after all, blacks that played old-time banjo whom they could logically have grouped with Pegram and Spark Gap. However, black blues musicians had received tremendous attention during the boom and the Rounders knew that a segment of their peers had a specific interest in African-American material. Moreover, they thought that a separate series might highlight and exalt black performers. Other series followed. Eventually the founders created imprints—other label names—that they used to divide the catalog into divisions that seemed to make commercial sense. Among these are Heartbeat, which issues reggae, and Bullseye Blues, created in 1990 as a home for contemporary blues artists.[44]

Befitting the founders' political interests, they branched fairly quickly into topical song. As champions of "the people" they loved finding obscure political material performed by the people's idealized representatives. "If some of these bluegrass or old-time musicians had a song that had a title that sounded like it could be political, we got

excited about things like that," says Nowlin. The first such release was by Blind Alfred Reed, a West Virginia fiddler who had recorded a series of topical songs for the Victor Recording Company in the late 1920s. His Rounder album, which inaugurated the 1000 series, was entitled How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live. The title song, recorded just one month after Black Tuesday ushered in the great depression, presents a litany of grievances against monied interests, condemning high prices, preachers "who preach for dough and not the soul," doctors who offer nothing but "a humbug feel, a dose of dope and a great big bill" and even police officers who "kill without a cause." "There'll Be No Distinction There" is an old spiritual that celebrates an egalitarian heaven that is welcoming to blacks and whites, Jews and Gentiles. "Why Do You Bob Your Hair Girls" displays Reed's censorious side, as he chides women who "rob the head God gave you and bear the flapper's name."

Not content to confine themselves to historical political commentary, the Rounders created the 4000 series, which they devoted to music that addressed contemporary social issues. They began the series in January 1973 with Mountain Moving Day, an explicitly feminist rock album that was also Rounder's first departure from the acoustic sounds that dominated the revival. Kit McClure, a member of the New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Band, initiated the project in 1972. "These were not 'the people.' These were kids like us," says Nowlin. The project involved not only the New Haven band but also a companion group, the Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band, which recorded separately and shared space on the album. It may have been, in the words of cultural critic Jennifer Baumgardner, "the first attempt to create explicitly feminist rock."[45] At the insistence of the New Haven band the label, with some difficulty, located

and hired a female engineer to supervise recording. The Rounders provided a "shoestring" budget and then stayed out of the way. "They exerted no kind of production values," remembers Naomi Weisstein, keyboard player for the Chicago band. "They told us to get in the studio and do what we could. A most frightening experience." Weisstein and her Chicago bandmates knew absolutely nothing about the Rounders and "didn't care. We knew they were sort of the successor to Alan Lomax. But mainly we didn't care." [46] In viewing the Rounders as akin to Lomax, Weisstein suggests implicitly that her own band was a successor to Guthrie or Molly Jackson, a reasonable perception in the context of the times. Those earlier performers hoped to galvanize the labor movement through song. In a later era, when Mick Jagger sang of women "Under My Thumb" and Jim Morrison deified his penis symbolically on stage, Weisstein hoped to shift rock's ethos toward a message of female empowerment and to energize a liberation movement composed largely of middle-class, educated women such as herself.

None of the bandmembers had played in rock bands previously. Weisstein grew up in New York City and had spent many Sundays at the Washington Square Park folk music jams. There, she found a scene dominated by men who performed and women who looked at them adoringly. Those women who did play an instrument seemed, to her, to be in the Baez mold. They were invariably "lovely" and sang mournful songs about "laying in the grave with arms folded." Weisstein just observed, never believing that she could be one of those women. After earning a Harvard Ph.D. in Psychology in the mid-sixties she accepted a teaching position at Loyola University in Chicago. In 1969 she helped organize the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU), a citywide umbrella organization that aspired to concrete socio-political ends. The CWLU fostered projects

devoted to rape and abortion counseling, childcare, prison reform and employment rights, among other things. Weisstein formed the band in 1970, inspired by her close friend Virginia Blaisdell who had previously formed the New Haven band. With the goal of raising consciousness through culture, both bands sought to make music in opposition to what members considered rock's sexist paradigm.[47]

Janis Joplin may have been a vocal powerhouse and an overwhelming stage presence but she stood removed from her audience—a distant commercial artist who sang songs written by others, while backed by male instrumentalists and supported by male management. In the Women's Liberation Rock Bands, women claimed ownership of the entire enterprise—writing their songs, playing all of the instruments and handling their business. In the original spirit of folk music as an informal participatory exercise that transcended stylistic genres, the bands' interaction with the audience became part of their presentation. The crowd sang along and danced among the bandmembers, who took requests on stage and honored audience demands to "play it again." Concerts often helped support a multiplicity of causes. The message, in part, was that any woman could control her own destiny, if not in the musical arena than elsewhere. Musically, the bands were not particularly aggressive. This was not the assaultive proto-punk of Detroit's politicized MC-5. However, before they struck a note, the band names telegraphed their explicit political nature, confirmed by their lyrical themes. The poetic title track casts emergent second wave feminism as an unstoppable force of nature, as the Chicago band sings "All sleeping women now awake and move." They perform "Papa Don't Lay That Shit On Me" as a funky vaudeville number with a message: "You bring me down/It makes you cool/You think I like it?/ You're a goddamn fool." In the somewhat more leaden

"Abortion Song," the New Haven group chants "Free our sisters/Abortion is our right." In the l990s Weisstein brought that tune to the attention of the organizers of a reproductive rights demonstration. She neither wrote nor performed it but thought that it might help rally the crowd. The group was uninterested. The song's shrill didacticism was too overt. In Weisstein's words, it was "too clunky." It is very much a product of its time and purpose, which seemed to demand unambiguous declarations of strength and belief.[48]

Mountain Moving Day never sold well. Weisstein suggests, laughingly, that her band might have received a collective total of $125.00 in royalties. That band broke up due to internal discord shortly after the record's release. While it lasted, it sold the disc at shows. Nonetheless Weisstein is convinced that the record circulated informally among women's groups through homemade cassette copies. "A lot of people had it," she says. "It got around. Nobody bought it. Ten people bought it and the rest ripped it off from them." A web site devoted to the Chicago Women's Liberation Union contains Weisstein's memoir of her days with the band. Today, she receives e-mail from women who remember the band or the album and who share stories of their own feminist awakening. Some say that their daughters have listened to the record. In 2005 Rounder reissued the long-out-of-print album on an expanded compact disc under the revised title Papa Don't Lay That Shit On Me. Weisstein helped coordinate the reissue and, in addition to adding previously unreleased material from the Chicago band, she included new musical contributions from Le Tigre, a contemporary group with an explicit feminist perspective. In what some describe as a post-feminist age, in which exercise of the choice to stay home and rear children is characterized as an example of liberation, Weisstein sought linkage with a group of younger women who honor more overtly transgressive choices.

In doing so, she situates Mountain Moving Day as more than a period piece. It is, instead, a link in an ongoing feminist chain—the product of her awakening and that of her friends and one tiny piece in a cultural mosaic that helped alter the intellectual and social landscape.[49]

Within the fairly small 4000 series Rounder has made some unusual forays into the music of international social movements. It has released albums celebrating Mao's revolution and the struggles of Nicaragua's Sandinistas. Rounder explored the South African resistance movement with Radio Freedom: Voice of the African National Congress and the People's Army Umkhonto We Sizwe. While living in South Africa in the early 1980s a friend of Nowlin's mailed the label owner a cassette tape marked "Beatles Songs." Upon listening, Nowlin discovered a collection of broadcasts from an underground radio station that the rebel African National Congress (ANC) had founded in 1967. Within South Africa, people risked criminal prosecution merely for listening to "Radio Freedom," which the ANC transmitted from neighboring countries, while moving periodically to avoid local authorities who cooperated with the South African government. The station mixed music by politically conscious African stars such as Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masakela with political commentary, news, topical songs and explicit calls for revolutionary action. Fascinated, Nowlin contacted ANC representatives in the United States who helped him secure tapes of additional broadcasts. After listening to approximately one week's worth of material from 1985, he prepared a representative sampler of station content that began with the daily "sign on" message, which contained a burst of machine gun fire that set the tone for what followed.[50]

The Rounders never doubted that their mission encompassed the release of topical music from other nations. Not only was such music consistent with their personal sympathies but it was also something that Folkways embraced. Fairly rapidly, however, they moved beyond the already broad boundaries of that admired forerunner toward an arguably broader spectrum of music. The trigger for this evolution was Mud Acres, a fairly typical revival record spearheaded by Happy Traum and his younger brother Artie, with which Rounder inaugurated its 3000 series**.** The album's genesis lay in a 1971 social gathering at Artie Traum's Woodstock, New York home. Irwin attended and spoke excitedly of his new record company. At the time, with many young people contemplating the value of life in the country, the Catskill Mountains were home to a number of musicians linked to the great boom, now seeking respite from urban life. Dylan lived there as did the members of The Band, who composed their first album in "Big Pink," their famed house in the Catskill town of West Saugerties. Happy Traum describes the vision that took shape within his own loose aggregation of artists as they contemplated the opportunity offered by this new record company. "With the music of local parties ringing in our ears, we decided that we would gather some people together and make a record that reflected the songs we liked to sing among ourselves, as opposed to the material we were recording for more commercial gain." In January 1972 several musicians recorded the album in one weekend at a small studio in upstate New York. Participants included the Traum brothers; Jim Rooney, onetime stalwart of the Cambridge revival scene; Bill Keith, Rooney's sometime performing partner and the first native northerner to join Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys; former Greenbriar Boy John Herald; and Maria Muldaur, once a member of the Jim Kweskin Jug Band and still a few

years away from her solo success. They named the resulting album after Artie Traum's front yard. Its subtitle, "Music Among Friends," was appropriate to the record's warm, inviting sound.[51]

The material recorded was fairly typical revival fare. There are songs associated with Guthrie and Leadbelly, early commercial country tunes, an acoustic blues number and an original banjo duet performed by Keith and Artie Traum. The Rounders were pleased to release the album but they recognized that it was somehow different from their other material. While the Spark Gap Wonder Boys, Joe Val and Country Cooking all performed music that originated within cultures other than their own, they worked within the recognizable parameters of specific vernacular styles. On Mud Acres, however, the repertoire consists of a miscellany of cultural borrowings, akin to that which so troubled Canadian performer Sheldon Posen as he agonized over his personal authenticity. Rather than being an old-time, bluegrass or blues album, it is defined best as an "urban revival album"—consisting of that grab bag of sources and styles that revivalists tend to meld into a singular performance aesthetic, one owing more to Greenwich Village or Harvard Square than to even an imagined American south. It was not particularly clear that this was the music of the downtrodden "people" nor was it the present-day topical music of the founders' leftist contemporaries. Recognizing the difference between Mud Acres and the albums of other northern urbanites then on their roster, the Rounders created the 3000 series, reserved for songs or styles that fell within the revival's wide orbit but that were, in Nowlin's words, "more contemporary, not so traditional."[52]

The creation of this series proved to be an initial step in Rounder's eventual embrace of that sometimes controversial folk world staple, the singer-songwriter. Happy

and Artie Traum's Hard Times in the Country, released in 1975 as Rounder 3007, contained five original songs, in addition to some traditional numbers. In 1977 the Traum brothers spearheaded the first of three Mud Acres' reunions. The 22 participating musicians on that initial sequel included most of the original line-up plus additional friends. Of the 15 tracks on Woodstock Mountains: More Music From Mud Acres (Rounder 3018), nine consisted of either traditional tunes or older country material. Six, however, were original compositions by band members. While the Traums and their friends were singer-songwriters in a literal sense, they were far more than the acoustic pop stars—or pop star hopefuls—that caused such angst in some folk music circles. They were, to use music industry vernacular, "rooted," meaning that they appreciated many traditional styles, which they sought to incorporate into their own songwriting and performing. This made them more acceptable to the young Rounders who, in their earliest days, avoided the "smooth, pretty style" of the confessional singer-songwriters influenced predominantly by contemporary artists such as Joni Mitchell. Many such performers made overtures to the label but—notwithstanding the niche of the 3000 series—the founders often referred them to Philo Records, a Vermont company founded in 1972 that was more welcoming to the genre.[53]

One of Philo's biggest "stars" was Mary McCaslin, a young Californian who was a major draw on the folk coffeehouse circuit of the seventies. McCaslin wrote evocative lyrics describing life in a mythic American west—songs that many committed revivalists could embrace for their regional or historical focus. Vocally, however, she bore similarities to Mitchell and she also recorded tunes by the Beatles and songwriter Randy Newman. The Rounders had nothing against either the Beatles or Newman but

McCaslin's overall image seemed contrary to their more rooted stylistic aesthetic. Still, the two labels began to work together. As Rounder branched into record distribution Philo became a client. When Philo filed for bankruptcy in the early 1980s, Rounder took over its administration at the request of the court appointed trustee and eventually purchased the Vermont company. The Philo name continued as a Rounder imprint and is now home to most of Rounder's contemporary acoustic singer-songwriters, including those with the "sweet, pretty voices" that the company once avoided. The first signing by the Rounder controlled Philo was Nanci Griffith, who has had much success as a pop-oriented folk star. The second was Christine Lavin, a strong writer and all-around comic entertainer who had worked with New York's Fast Folk musical cooperative. Aware of distinctions that once seemed so important, Irwin observes that the slow "organic" development of the founders' relationship with Philo allowed them to ease into the singer-songwriter field. "It wasn't like, 'poof, you're a singer-songwriter label.' We never," he jokes, "had the tarnish."[54]

With Mud Acres opening the door, the 3000 series eventually became home to a miscellany of non-commercial music ranging from the surrealistic contemporary tunes of those early idols, the Holy Modal Rounders, to the rockabilly stylings of Sleepy LaBeef and the avant-garde jazz of Sun Ra. The path to these sometimes eccentric recordings began in 1977, when the Rounders used the 3000 series to host the recording debut of George Thorogood and the Destroyers, an album that had an enormous impact on the company, philosophically and commercially. Thorogood, who grew up in Delaware before moving to Boston, was a young, white electric slide guitarist who played bluesy rock and roll expressed through a repertoire drawn from the likes of John Lee Hooker,

Elmore James, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, post-World War II African-American pioneers of electric blues and rock. He was hardly the first to have trod this ground. In the 1960s the Rolling Stones and Johnny Winter, to name just two, attained fame with the identical approach. Thorogood was just one more in a long line of white performers who mined a black-originated repertoire, even as many of the artists who created that repertoire were still working, often with less success. Viewed cynically, his growling approach to Hooker's paean to "one bourbon, one Scotch and one beee-ah" barely rose above the level of caricature. The Rounders initially paid him no mind, immersed in exploring vernacular sounds that were both more obscure and more conventionally "traditional."[55]

Cambridge school bus driver John Forward introduced artist and label. Forward used to visit Rounder's warehouse and buy albums for personal use direct from the company. Gradually Rounder's small staff came to know him as the label's single best customer. After selecting albums of interest, he would place copies of those that he could not yet afford in a box, which staff then set aside until his return for another round of purchases. As Thorogood's self-proclaimed number one fan, Forward tried for a long time to interest Rounder in recording him. He provided the founders with an amateur tape of the band. Though they enjoyed it, they saw nothing distinctive enough to warrant a shift in their focus. Forward continued to push, urging the Rounders to attend one of the band's live shows where, he insisted, it truly blossomed. Finally Nowlin relented and attended a performance that Forward had helped to organize. It took only two songs before he concluded that the bus driver had found something truly extraordinary. Overwhelmed by Thorogood's energy, stage presence and obvious love for performing,

he called Irwin and told him he needed to come to the club. Eventually each of the founders saw Thorogood in performance many times before they committed to making a record. They came to like him personally and to respect his passion. Still, notwithstanding the blues-based repertoire, they fretted over Thorogood's obvious identity as a rocker. They enjoyed the Stones and did not agonize over the "white boy playing the blues" clichés that had once dominated so many folk revival debates. Intellectually, Thorogood's work was not far removed from what Country Cooking was doing with bluegrass. Indeed, the Ithaca bluegrassers were arguably taking more liberties with their sources than Thorogood was with his. The question remained whether, on a gut level, this was right for Rounder. This was not bluegrass, that folk world staple. It was rock and roll, it was electric and, assuredly, it was not something that Folkways would release.[56]

Given that a new generation of pop music fans is born every four years or so, many young record buyers in the mid-seventies were unfamiliar with the African-American artists who had inspired the Stones and other British Invasion bands just a decade earlier. Weary of a scene that had grown increasingly bombastic and pretentious, rock adventurers were moving on toward early punk and new wave, as Led Zeppelin and other arena bands continued to bury their blues "sources" in layers of psychedelia and heavy metal. On another part of the spectrum disco was ascending, becoming a phenomenon that would soon capture the attention of the Stones themselves. In this climate Thorogood managed to look a bit "traditional," at least in the narrow terms of the rock music industry. He honored his sources and played his rocking blues straight, never relegating it to raw material for strained experimentation. For their part, the Rounders had

already demonstrated their allegiance to true vernacular originators, black and white. They had nothing to prove on that score. They would have loved to record John Lee Hooker himself, but he was not available to the small Cambridge folk label. Thorogood was, and they were tempted.

For several months, the Rounders debated signing Thorogood. They feared going the route of Elektra, which they felt had veered off course after signing The Doors. They worried that friends and fans would become confused about their commitment to their mission or, worse, view them as sell outs. Thorogood, who had no other commercial recording opportunities, pressed his case, pointing out that he represented the rhythm and blues "tradition" or the "roots" of rock. Eventually the Rounders agreed. They enjoyed the music, liked the bandmembers and wanted to do it. Their first attempt at recording showed their inexperience with rock. Adopting a configuration the band often used on stage, they recorded with just two guitars and a drummer. The playback revealed that they needed a bass player to fill out the sound and they ended up recording the album a second time. From a commercial standpoint, nothing in either the industry landscape or in Rounder's history suggested that the record would become anything other than a resume builder for Thorogood—one that might help him get steady club work. Nobody dreamed seriously that it would be a hit.[57]

In numerical terms Thorogood's debut—released in July 1977—was not an immediate smash. Rolling Stone reported that it sold approximately 40,000 copies in the four months following its release. For Rounder, it might as well have been a million. The label had never before sold in such numbers. More importantly, the record was added to the playlists of hip FM stations, and fueled by word of Thorogood's sensational

performances it began to develop a cachet. Press was widespread and favorable. Calling the record a "notable debut," Down Beat declared Thorogood "an impressive and hugely entertaining performer, a strong persuasive vocalist in a straightforward ungimmicked style . . . and a gripping guitarist . . ." Using a characterization that might have pleased the tradition-minded Rounders, New York's Village Voice said that he captured the precise point at which blues, country and rock met, before they were diluted by ineffective imitators. Given the appropriately limited expectations of both Thorogood and Rounder, the record was an overwhelming success in terms of sales, praise and impact, both artistic and commercial.[58]

Rounder released Move It On Over, Thorogood's second album, in October 1978. The record's musical approach was virtually identical to that of its predecessor. In a back cover essay signed by "The Rounder Folks" the founders sought to assure fans and perhaps themselves that nothing important had changed, despite the unexpected burst of success. In an effort to suggest that Thorogood was perhaps a bit of a folk artist himself—at least in the expansive sense of the term—the Rounders took pains to present him as a "reluctant star," a genuine everyman uninterested in the "adulation" and "artificial pleasures" that accompany rock and roll success. The essay describes both the artist and the label owners as devoted to "the many local institutions that contribute to a community or neighborhood consciousness," a milieu that had historically produced "many excellent folk musicians, who usually went unrecognized among mass audiences and the mass media." The founders assured readers that they "still like 'old' music best" and prefer obscure "quality labels like Arhoolie or [Louisiana's] Excello more than the bustling, blustering conglomerates." Stressing that they remained "fiercely independent"

they expressed hope that the network of small record distributors of which they were then a part could be "strengthened financially and more sought after by stores that care about music."[59]

Read today against the backdrop of the founders' initial concerns about Thorogood, the essay's many truths seem joined by equal parts hope, rationalization and self-defense. Beyond any doubt the Rounders loved old music and small labels. They liked Thorogood and valued community participation, artistic and otherwise. They saw Thorogood's music as an art form shamefully ignored by much of the music industry. In releasing it they performed a service that no major label was then willing to undertake, at least until Thorogood demonstrated his commercial potential. The wholly unexpected success, however, heightened their initial fears that one-time admirers would see them as sell-outs, as it enmeshed them in the commercial music business to a previously unimaginable degree. In 1979 Thorogood's sophomore album passed 500,000 units sold, earning Rounder its first gold record. In Chapter 9 I discuss the impact that this success had on the label from a business standpoint. Artistically its impact was twofold. Determined to demonstrate the strength of their original mission, the founders strove to keep their focus. The result has been a steady stream of traditionally-based vernacular music from a wide array of cultures, spanning the globe. The founders also concluded that more contemporary—and perhaps more commercial—sounds could co-exist with those displaying a deeper fidelity to older traditional styles. In practical terms, they learned that such commercial material could help finance their original mission. Additionally, if chosen carefully it could itself constitute a meaningful cultural contribution.[60]

Scott Billington credits the Thorogood albums with creating the climate that allowed him to produce Rounder's Grammy-winning big-band record for Gatemouth Brown in 1982. Previously Billington's production credits were limited to two "documentary-style" recordings. One was by Joseph Spence, a Bahamian guitarist that he and Nowlin recorded in a Nassau hotel room. The other was a live solo recording by bluesman Johnny Shines taken from a Boston Blues Society tape. Thorogood, in Billington's view, brought Rounder a measure of professional credibility that allowed it to record "roots artists with the potential of commercial success." Personally, it emboldened Billington to move beyond the stripped-down acoustic records that he had made previously. "My dream at the time," he recalls, "was not to make academic records. I wanted something that spoke to someone in a more contemporary way."[61] Brown's album, recorded near the musician's home in Bogalusa, Louisiana, led to a "spiraling number of musical contacts" that helped Billington—and Rounder—attain a preeminent position in the Louisiana music scene of the 1980s and 1990s. [62] Exploring New Orleans in the early eighties, Billington was amazed to discover that virtually no one was recording many of the talented musicians who lived and worked there. Billington favored the rhythm and blues that had dominated the city's music scene in the 1950s and early 1960s. It is an urban sound with heavy measures of jazz, soul and gospel, that had slipped into commercial obscurity as artists and labels found greater success with the pop sounds of Motown and, later, disco and funk. "I was just floored by the talent that was there," Billington says. "I found that I could approach these people and they were glad to be able to make records again."[63]

He began working with piano masters James Booker and Tuts Washington before beginning a series of recordings with Irma Thomas and Johnny Adams, who had each first recorded in 1959. Thomas had reached number 17 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1964 with "Wish Someone Would Care." Adams hit the Hot 100 twice, reaching number 84 with "Release Me" in 1968 and number 28 the following year with "Reconsider Me." While Thomas's brief stint in the pop Top 20 and her sharper business sense provided her with a slightly broader range of performing opportunities, Adams' name meant nothing to the predominantly white tourists who sought entertainment in New Orleans. He had spent virtually his entire career performing in small lounges and roadhouses in predominantly black communities along the Gulf Coast. By the 1980s neither did much more than gig in and around New Orleans. Their always-sporadic recording careers were in shambles. Between 1984 and 2000 Billington produced eight albums for Thomas, which earned her two Grammy nominations, and nine for Adams. These records presented the performers as contemporary artists, not "oldies" acts. In addition to a variety of blues, soul and pop, Thomas recorded an all-gospel collection, while Adams' output includes two albums devoted entirely to jazz. None of the records were hits in major label terms but they re-ignited the singers' careers, earning praise among aficionados and providing the performers with steady work on the international festival circuit.[64]

In the years following the success of George Thorogood, Rounder has released deeply traditional albums, albums that draw from traditional sources and albums that lack traditional elements entirely. Some of these records are commercial in nature. Many are not. Some records—such as those by Thorogood or Johnny Adams—reflect vernacular heritage but are not "folk" music as the music industry and most consumers understand

the term. Many of Rounder's records fall within the worthy category of "art for art's sake." Most of these recordings might never have existed but for the label's broad canvas. This traditional/contemporary mix became Rounder's hallmark as it distinguished itself from those labels that inspired it—the predominantly traditional Folkways and Arhoolie on the one hand and the far more mainstream Elektra on the other. As its vision broadened Rounder abandoned the anti-profit posture of its early years. The founders learned about distribution, marketing and promotion as they strived to survive. They entered the commercial world with records that marketed heritage as they simultaneously challenged old ideas about the nature of tradition. Over the years many of Rounder's artists and records became enmeshed in conflicts regarding changing concepts of tradition and the folk. In the two chapters that follow, I explore these conflicts within the worlds of old-time country music and the Cajun and zydeco scene of southern Louisiana.

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[1] Ken Irwin (A), interview by author, explaining the three-pronged basis of the label name. See also, Charles Wolfe, "Rounder Is 25! The Early Days of Rounder: Vol. 1," Old-Time Herald, Fall 1995, 35, 36.

[2] Otto L. Bettmann, The Good Old Days—They Were Terrible (New York: Random House, 1974), 133; Paul Oliver, Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 35, 129.

[3] Trad., arr. and adapted C. Ashley/SmithsonianFolkways Pub., BMI. Released originally on the audio recording Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's Vol. 2, Folkways LP FA 2359. Re-released on CD as The Original Folkways Recordings of Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley 1960-1962, Smithsonian Folkways SF40029/30.

[4] Billy Bob Hargus, "Peter Stampfel interview—part 1 of 3," Perfect Sound Forever, online at <http://www.furious.com/perfect/stampfel.html> (accessed 9 March 2005).

[5] Stampfel, interview by author.

[6] Nick Tosches, "Records," Rolling Stone, 10 June 1971, 43.

[7] Peter Stampfel, liner notes to the 1963 audio recording The Holy Modal Rounders Prestige/Folklore Records 14031, reprinted as notes to the audio recording The Holy Modal Rounders, 1 & 2 Fantasy Records FCD-24711-2.

[8] Larry Kelp, liner notes to the audio recording The Holy Modal Rounders, 1 & 2 Fantasy Records FCD-24711-2.

[9] Ibid., for Van Ronk quote; Irwin, e-mail to author, 15 May 2004; "Euphoria" by George Remaily (Careers—BMG Music—BMI).

[10] Stampfel, remarks from the audio recording Holy Modal Rounders: Live in 1965, privately produced and released as HMR-1.

[11] Stampfel, interview by author; "Can I Sleep In Your Barn Tonight, Mister?," public domain, lyrics from The Songs of Charlie Poole, online at <http://world.std.com/~gd llal/charlie_poole.htm> (accessed 9 March 2005).

[12] Nowlin (B), interview by author.

[13] I take the text from the liner notes to the audio recording by The New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Band and the Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band, Mountain Moving Day, Rounder Records 4001, at p. 15.

[14] The story of the Pegram recording is oft-told. Irwin (B), interview by author. See also Wolfe, "Rounder Is 25!," 36; Tony Trischka, "Ken Irwin and Rounder Records: 25 Years Of Bluegrass," Bluegrass Unlimited, July 1996, 16, 18; Bob Carlin, liner notes to the audio recording George Pegram, Rounder Records CD 0001 (a compact disc reissue of the original album, with additional material).

[15] Arthur Palmer Hudson, "The Carolina Folk Festival," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XII (1948): 177, 178.

[16] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[17] Carson Taylor, "We Had A Sure Feeling We Had Seen The Champ," Franklin County Times (Rocky Mount, VA), 29 May 1969, quoted in Pat J. Ahrens, Union Grove: The First 50 Years (privately published by Pat J. Ahrens, 1975), 119.

[18] Nowlin (A), interview by author; contract between Rounder and Pegram in Rounder file folder marked 0001, photocopy in author's possession.

[19] Rossi, interview by author; "Fiddler's Town," Newsweek, 29 April 1968, 96.

[20] Rossi, interview by author.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[23] Richard K. Spottswood, "Record Reviews," Bluegrass Unlimited, March 1971, 14; on Spottswood, see Alan J. Steiner, "Dick Spottswood's Homegrown Music Hour," Bluegrass Unlimited, August 1990, 57.

[24] "Jimi Hendrix 1945-1970," Rolling Stone, 15 October 1970; "Janis Joplin 1943-1970," Rolling Stone, 29 October 1970; "Singing Songs For Woody Guthrie," Rolling Stone 15 October 1970, 10.

[25] Dennis Wilen, "Philly Folkies' Community Vibes," Rolling Stone, 15 October 1970, 20; Traum advertisement in Rolling Stone, 29 October 1970, 17.

[26] Paul W. Soelberg, "Modern Country Radio: Friend Or Foe," Billboard, 17 October 1970, CM-44.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Pat J. Ahrens, A History of the Musical Careers of DeWitt "Snuffy" Jenkins, Banjoist and Homer "Pappy" Sherrill, Fiddler (Columbia, SC: published privately by Pat J. Ahrens, 1970), passim.

[29] Jenkins quoted in Tony Trischka, "Snuffy Jenkins," Bluegrass Unlimited, October 1977, 20-21; Bill Malone, Country Music, U.S.A., rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 123.

[30] Ahrens, A History; Pat Ahrens, interview by author.

[31] Pat J. Ahrens, "Snuffy" Jenkins and "Pappy" Sherrill: The Hired Hands (Columbia, SC: published privately by Pat J. Ahrens, 2002), passim.

[32] L. Mayne Smith, "An Introduction To Bluegrass," Journal of American Folklore 78 (1965): 245, reprinted in The Bluegrass Reader, ed. Thomas Goldsmith, 77-79, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Alan J. Lomax, "Bluegrass Background: Folk Music with Overdrive," in Goldsmith, Bluegrass Reader, 19 (reprinted from Esquire, October 1959).

[33] Stephen L. Betts, "Joe Val & The New England Bluegrass Boys," in Music Hound Country: The Essential Album Guide, eds. Brian Mansfield and Gary Graff, 450-452 (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1997); liner notes to the audio recording Joe Val and the New England Bluegrass Boys, One Morning in May, Rounder Records 0003.

[34] Liner notes to One Morning in May.

[35] Walter V. Saunders, "Record Reviews," Bluegrass Unlimited, January 1972, 10.

[36] Tony Trischka, interview by Brian L. Knight, "Getting the Bends with Tony Trischka," Vermont Review, online at <http://members.tripod.com/ vermontreview/Interviews/ trischka.htm> (accessed 9 March 2005).

[37] Pete Wernick, interview by author; Pete Wernick, "Letters," Bluegrass Unlimited, February 1967, 4.

[38] Wernick, interview by author.

[39] Ibid.

[40] George B. McCeney, "Record Reviews," Bluegrass Unlimited, March 1972, 10. Wernick, interview, by author.

[41] Wernick, interview by author; George B. McCeney, "Record Reviews," Bluegrass Unlimited, January 1975, 20.

[42] Wernick, interview by author; Barenberg, e-mail to Ken Irwin, 10 December 2004, forwarded to author; Tony Trischka, e-mail to Irwin, 11 December 2004, forwarded to author. Trischka, who overheard the remark, remembers Monroe saying "keep playing them new notes."

[43] Rick Kubetz, "Union Station: Traditional, Progressive and Original," Bluegrass Unlimited, October 1988, 56.

[44] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[45] Nowlin (B), interview by author; Jennifer Baumgardner, "Aural History: The Politics of Feminist Rock," from the liner notes to the audio recording Papa Don't Lay That Shit On Me, Rounder CD 4001 (a 2005 reissue of the Mountain Moving Day album, with additional music and expanded notes).

[46] Naomi Weisstein, interview by author.

[47] Weisstein, interview by author; see also, Naomi Weisstein, "Days of Celebration and Resistance: The Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band, 1970-1973," in The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices From Women's Liberation, eds. Rachel Blau Du Plessis and Ann Snitow, 350-361 (New York, Three Rivers Press, 1998).

[48] Weisstein, interview by author.

[49]Ibid. The web memoir is published as Weisstein, "Days of Celebration." It appears online at <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUMemoir/naomirock.html> (accessed 9 March 2005).

[50] Nowlin (B), interview by author.

[51] Happy Traum, in the liner notes to the audio recording Woodstock Mountains: Music from Mud Acres, Rounder Records CD 11520.

[52] For the closing quotation, see Nowlin (B), interview by author. For a discussion of the revival aesthetic see Ellen J. Stekert, "Folk and Nonsense in the Urban Folksong Movement, 1930-66," in Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg, 84-106 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[53] "Smooth, pretty style," is from Leighton (A), interview by author, who used it in reference to Mary McCaslin.

[54] Irwin (A), interview, by author.

[55] I draw the parody of Thorogood's articulation from Greil Marcus, "Reviews," Rolling Stone, 23 March 1978, 67.

[56] Nowlin (A), interview by author; liner notes to the audio recording George Thorogood And The Destroyers, Move It On Over, Rounder Records 3024.

[57] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[58] Fred Schruers, "George Thorogood and the Destroyers, The Other End, New York City, February 24, 1978," Rolling Stone, 20 April 1978, 84; Pete Welding, "George Thorogood and the Destroyers," Down Beat, 13 July 1978, 34; Dan Oppenheimer, "George Thorogood Passes Through," Village Voice, 10 July 1978, 47.

[59] Liner notes to Move It On Over.

[60] Sales figures from "George Thorogood Legal Battle Shifts To Massachusetts Courts," Variety, 11 July 1979, 73.

[61] Scott Billington, interview by author.

[62] Billington, e-mail to Irwin, 25 January 2005, forwarded to author.

[63] Brett Milano, "Session Man: Rounder's Scott Billington," Boston Phoenix, 7 May 1998, online at <http://www.bostonphoenix.com/archive/music/98/05/07/cellars%5Fby%5F starlight.html> (accessed 9 March 2005).

[64] Jeff Hannusch, I Hear You Knockin': The Sound of New Orleans Rhythm and Blues (Ville Platte, LA: Swallow Publications, 1985), 225-236, 267-280; John Sinclair, "Irma Thomas: An Audience with the Soul Queen of New Orleans," Blues Access, Spring 2000, 30; Jeff Hannusch, "Masters Of Louisiana Music: Johnny Adams," Offbeat, December 2002, 20-24.

6

TOWARD AN AUTHENTICITY OF SELF
Old-Time Music In The Modern World

In the early 1970s Canadian Seymour Posen struggled to reconcile his seemingly competing roles as an academic folklorist and a musician who performed songs drawn from many different cultural traditions. In 1993, looking back on a generation in which musicians routinely adopted a broad array of regional, ethnic and racial styles, he wondered why he had ever fretted so much about his lack of musical authenticity.

> In these postmodern, postfusion [times], most folk performers offer a personalized collage of material, executed with reference to all manner of past styles and sources. The elements are bound together by an overall sound—Celtic, say, or country, or singer/songwriter, or even 'traditional' (another can of worms). If anything, 'authentic' has become a 'flavor' within that performance sound.[1]

Posen offers an accurate assessment of contemporary musical practice but it is a practice that remains controversial, distressing those cultural partisans who cherish specific traditions—however hybridized they may be—and the groups and regions from which they derive. In the twenty-first century vernacular music—folk music—continues to thrive in a perpetual state of tension, caught between those who pull it back toward an idealized past and context, and those who push it forward toward an often kaleidoscopic blend of diffuse sounds and cultural referents.

In this chapter I examine the varied ways in which revivalists negotiate the constructs of heritage, tradition and authenticity in the context of the ongoing old-time country music revival. Watching the fray are the many music lovers—perhaps the overwhelming majority—who take no stand amidst the intellectual wars but strive to hear

as much music as possible, wanting simply to enjoy, learn from and honor a distinctive American art form. I include among this presumed majority the Rounder founders, who have managed to float resolutely above the cultural battleground for decades. Avoiding any overarching theoretical posture, the Rounders have consistently released records that illustrate all of the varied approaches to the performance, marketing and appreciation of musical heritage. Early in their musical exploration Irwin, Nowlin and Leighton fell in love with both the so-called authentic singing of Clarence Ashley and the more "surrealistic" old-time vision offered by the Holy Modal Rounders. Over time they came to understand the culturally-freighted distinction between those urbanites whose perception of old-time musicians never penetrated the revival's romantic shroud, and the idealized rural musicians themselves who invariably proved to be multi-dimensional human beings. Though George Pegram, Snuffy Jenkins and Pappy Sherrill embodied the idea of the authentic, they occupied the vast middle ground between Cambridge revivalists and stereotypically traditional community entertainers. Jenkins and Sherill had spent years as consummate music industry professionals. Pegram had sought commercial opportunity, though with less success, and was well acquainted with folksong collectors and folk festival promoters. Each man had recorded previously and each was a self-conscious performer, knowledgeable about the use of the stage and aware of his impact on an audience.

The Rounders prized their opportunity to record such musicians. They also hoped to emulate Lomax and Asch and record non-professionals who played socially and possessed a style and repertoire presumably uncontaminated by the music industry's lures and demands. Fairly early in its history Rounder began issuing albums by wholly

unknown old-time musicians who had generally confined themselves to informal performances within their own communities. Mark Wilson, now a Philosophy Professor at the University of Pittsburgh, became a long-time collaborator in this endeavor. Raised in Oregon, the son of an avocational jazz pianist, Wilson developed an early interest in folk music, which led him to "read all the folksong books" in the library as a child. During the boom he listened initially to the Kingston Trio but gravitated quickly to more authentic performers after discovering Leadbelly's records. While still in high school he tried his hand as an amateur "folklorist." He sought out Edward Crain, a singer and guitarist featured on Smith's Anthology, who was then hosting an Oregon television show. Crain, born in 1901, was a native Texan who had worked on cattle drives and had a brief recording career singing cowboy songs. Wilson made private tapes that attempted to document Crain's cowboy repertoire. As an undergraduate at Portland's Reed College in the late sixties he promoted a small concert tour by Buell Kazee, the Kentucky balladeer and ordained Baptist minister who had recorded commercially in the twenties and for the Library of Congress in the forties, before enjoying a brief revival resurgence.[2]

While a graduate student at Harvard, Wilson met Nowlin at bluegrass shows around Boston, as Nowlin sold Rounder's earliest releases from a tabletop. Wilson enjoyed bluegrass and old-time music but, beyond his early flirtation with The Kingston Trio, he had no interest in the boom's more commercial aspects. "I never liked the folk scene," he says. "I've never had much to do with it." He heard groups in the "spirit" of the Holy Modal Rounders but he hated their irreverence, which he considered "denigrating to the music." Of The Spark Gap Wonder Boys, he says, "That's the sort of stuff I

disapproved of because of the attitude," which he saw as "wise guy." He holds the same opinion today, as this essay from the 1990s demonstrates:[3]

> To my ears at least, the music of the revivalists has become rather ingrown, for they learn mainly amongst themselves, and [their music] frequently lacks the virtues that supply genuine traditional music with its special élan. For example, the fiddle playing one often hears in these [revival] circles ranges from the bland to the pointlessly frenetic, interpretations that all grow from a failure to appreciate the intrinsic subtleties of the American dance tradition (I've heard more than one puzzled traditional player characterize these efforts as 'hippy fiddle music').[4]

Wilson also detests what he considers the revivalist tendency to sentimentalize traditional performers, which, in his view, detracts from the musicians' far more interesting "real lives." He disdains the rural caricatures he finds prevalent within revival circles. Citing a discussion he once had with Roscoe Holcomb, the Kentucky banjo player who enjoyed renown during the boom, he notes Holcomb's puzzlement over photographers who always posed him in front of his old barn while ignoring the gorgeous Kentucky scenery all around.[5]

Notwithstanding Nowlin's acknowledged romanticism and his connection to Spark Gap, a friendship developed around their shared love of traditional music. Wilson began his formal involvement with Rounder by writing and editing liner notes. He attended some of the label's early recording sessions and, distressed by the lack of technical engineering expertise, he developed his own skills in this area so he could assist. Eventually he took on the task of recording those musicians who met his rigid aesthetic. He wanted to hear only the "country people"—specifically those from "the last couple of generations that grew up before rural electrification, for true tradition." "I'm what they used to call a purist, I guess." Wilson, who still works with Rounder, has

supervised many of the label's recordings—both collections of ballad singing and the instrumental fiddle and banjo music that accompanied square dances and parties in an earlier era. Particularly as recorded by the local musicians whom Wilson favors, it is about as non-commercial a sound as one can find. Some of Wilson's productions have sold in the hundreds of copies and sales of over 2000 constitute a best seller.[6]

By playing close attention to tune and technique, and by listening to the stories musicians tell, Wilson hopes to discern the nature of early styles and determine how later ones developed. He acknowledges the influence of professional musicians and the mass media, but after several decades of avocational field research he has concluded that scholars overemphasize such influences due to their overreliance on the most readily available historical sources. With respect to the informal community music making that Wilson reveres, there are no newspaper accounts, concert programs or recordings, leaving a gap in our understanding of musical practice, which Wilson strives to fill. He explains his philosophy in his liner notes to Kentucky Old-Time Banjo:

> In my opinion, some modern writers on the banjo's history overemphasize the importance to folk tradition of the music that can be found in the nineteenth century tutors [published banjo manuals]. In fact, a great disparity often yawns between what can be found in instruction manuals and how the instrument in question was actually played contemporaneously . . . Likewise, family memories—e.g., those of Paul Smith or Owen 'Snake' Chapman [each represented on Rounder releases]—confidently indicate many of the alternative forms of two-finger playing were well established by the 1870s . . . As with fiddle notations, the concert or vaudeville style performances from which most of the transcriptions in the Victorian banjo tutors derive were probably not the primary vehicles by which most forms of banjo and fiddle music traveled across the South. Most of the banjo pieces [that Wilson heard during field research] seem to have reached their performers completely beneath the radar of the tutors and the [professional] songsters.[7]

Beyond his desire to provide a more complete picture of cultural transmission, Wilson hopes to promote "simple cultural justice." The "folk," he says, "deserve to have their music heard in its proper contours, not filtered through several layers of interpretive remove." Believing that musicians' lives are integral to a complete understanding of their music, the liner notes to Wilson's recordings generally include detailed biographical or, where possible, autobiographical essays. He favors notes that rely on the artist's own words to describe both the music and the context of its creation. Typical are those to Kitty Puss: Old-Time Fiddle Music from Kentucky by Buddy Thomas, an impoverished fiddler who died of heart failure in 1974 at the age of 39, shortly after he recorded his album. Thomas explains how, despite his relative youth, he learned the old-time tunes of his region.

> A lot of my fiddle tunes I learned from Morris Allen up there in Portsmouth [Ohio]. He's getting near eighty but he's still a pretty good old fiddler. Back in the thirties, he was a bachelor and had a good job in a steel mill and he used to like to get all the fiddlers together. His uncle John Kiebler was a real good fiddler and Clark Kessinger would come stay at Morris' house for a week or two. I first met him when I was out fox hunting. Morris had some lost dogs and he had his fiddle with him. And I then got to hearing him and different good fiddlers around Portsmouth and the fiddle sounded so pretty that I just had to get into it and learn those tunes. Then Sam Cox told Jimmy Wheeler about me. He said, 'It's a young fiddler out there a-growin' up that knows parts of them old tunes. You ought to go out there and kindly help him out.' And so Jimmy came up and made me a tape.[8]

It angers Wilson that revivalists tend to receive the lion's share of public acclaim, as well as the bulk of the meager financial rewards possible through the playing of old-time music or, as he would characterize the revivalists' efforts, faux-old-time music. Those musicians who seek professional employment, generally outsiders to the cultures

they emulate, are faced with the perpetual need to draw an audience. They accomplish this, Wilson believes, by distorting the art, hoping to maximize its admittedly narrow commercial appeal. Of necessity, these emulators are generally skilled at self-promotion. Wilson strives to record the best traditional musicians he can find—a group that does not necessarily overlap with those interested in pursuing professional performance careers. In fact, the musicians that he favors often dislike the personal grandstanding necessary to hold the attention of a club or festival crowd. He describes the experience of Joe Cormier, a Boston-based fiddler who performs from within the traditions of his native Cape Breton Island. At a relatively rare commercial performance outside his own community, a promoter asked Cormier to do more than sit stock-still and fiddle. He wanted some kind of "show" or, at the least, a smile. Cormier's response, paraphrased by Wilson, was, "I came to be a fiddler, not a clown." As a consequence of this professional/amateur divide, Wilson "often encounters a situation in Appalachia today where 'folk festivals' are largely dominated by [revivalists], even if excellent traditional musicians may live nearby," a commercial disparity that strikes him as deeply unjust.[9]

Despite the sincerity of Wilson's concern, it is difficult to characterize all revivalists as either striving professionals or callow "wise guy" replicators. In the late sixties and early seventies, a small and thoroughly local old-time music revival scene developed among graduate students attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and nearby Duke University. At a time when the most visibly egregious civil rights battles seemed over and southern sounds were beginning to infuse rock music, a new generation of students sensed that the south was a part of America awaiting fuller exploration, a perception latent in the late-sixties but fully apparent just a few years later.

Among these students was Florida native and future folklorist Alan Jabbour, raised by a father who had emigrated from Syria and a mother who had grown up in the deep south. As a youth, Jabbour studied classical violin but, prompted by the civil rights movement and his mother's heritage, he shifted to old-time fiddling as part of his own quest to understand his native region. While pursuing scholarship and musical adventure, Jabbour met Henry Reed, an octogenarian Virginia fiddler with an extensive repertoire of unknown tunes that he had learned traditionally. The young student befriended Reed, played music with him and spent time with his family. He also recorded Reed in informal performance and then taught his tunes to the circle of North Carolina friends with whom he played music.[10]

Several bands formed from within this circle, the most well known being the Hollow Rock String Band, with Jabbour on fiddle, and the Fuzzy Mountain String Band, affectionately dubbed the Fuzzies. Though each performed publicly on occasion, such performance was not their reason for being and they were not professional touring ensembles. Their purpose was to explore the music they loved and, according to Tom Carter, one-time banjoist for the Fuzzies, foster "a sense of community." As described by Fuzzy Mountain fiddler Bill Hicks, "The band was the twice weekly [jam] session, and big parties on holidays, with children, relatives, family, smoked oysters, turkey, and country ham. The band, in a way, was a controlled jam session." Both Hollow Rock and the Fuzzies concentrated on instrumentals and the development of a "unison ensemble sound" in which banjo, fiddle and mandolin played a generally unvarying lead melody, while the guitar kept the beat. The addition of a second or even a third fiddle or banjo might make the tune louder but would not change its structure. This approach, perfect for

informal group playing, fuels old-time music jams to this day. Without vocals, instrumental soloing or harmonic band arrangements, any player capable of executing the melody can join in, mid-song.[11]

Like Hollow Rock, the Fuzzies enjoyed playing with long-time residents of the Appalachian region—the true traditionalists revered by revivalists. Relying on a network of personal musical connections, members often made weekend visits to local musicians residing throughout the North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia region. As Hicks recalls, they would "then come home on Sunday, review the field tape for the newest gem, and, by Wednesday, present a new tune for the group to start working on." Preservation minded and deeply respectful of their sources, the bands valued fidelity to the "original" sound and style, and they expended considerable effort making certain they played the tunes "right," which meant exactly "as the source played them." Aware of the treasure trove of tunes that Jabbour had discovered, everyone was, to paraphrase banjoist Carter, looking for their own Henry Reed.[12]

In 1968 Ken Davidson's Kanawha Records issued Traditional Dance Tunes, an album by Hollow Rock that introduced some of Reed's repertoire to the world. Shortly thereafter the group broke up, as members left North Carolina to pursue varied professional opportunities, with Jabbour going on to an illustrious career in public folklore. After Rounder's inaugural releases, the Fuzzies met the label founders at a West Virginia music festival. All agreed that the band would record an album for Rounder. The group recorded their debut LP, The Fuzzy Mountain String Band, in a bandmember's living room. Rounder released this predominantly instrumental collection in May 1972, with notes that carefully identified each Appalachian traditionalist who served as the

source of a tune. In 1973 Rounder released a follow-up Fuzzy Mountain record entitled Summer Oak and Porch. One year later it issued an album by a new version of the Hollow Rock String Band, with Alan Jabbour again playing fiddle on a collection of tunes drawn predominantly from Henry Reed's repertoire.[13]

Hollow Rock and the Fuzzies represent a revivalism devoted to a one-on-one exploration of cultural expression. Band members immersed themselves in the lives of their sources. They visited them in their homes, got to know their families, ate with them and played music with them. Then, through precise replication they carefully preserved and disseminated the tunes that their sources had taught them. In the process they attempted to convey something of the culture within which the tunes developed. Depending upon one's point of view they either honored or exploited their sources. While some, such as Mark Wilson, insist that such interpreters soften the distinctive edges of the music, stripping it of depth while making it more saleable, others simply disagree. Dick Spottswood, a discerning observer whose critique of Spark Gap in Bluegrass Unlimited revealed his own qualms about revivalists, believed that Fuzzy Mountain managed to transcend any limitations of origin. Reviewing the band's first album, he concluded not only that their playing was "impeccable" but that they approached the music with "genuine taste and feeling."[14] Wilson may hear something in the music that Spottswood does not and his distaste of imitators may influence his perceptions. He presumably finds it disturbing that any listener would choose to enjoy old-time music through the sounds of performers new to the genre, while Rounder and other small labels also release performances by the old-time masters themselves. However, one constant of commercial folk revivalism is that consumers enjoy listening to music performed by people with

whom they can identify. At least for the more casual listener, the music may appear worthy of attention precisely because people like themselves are performing it. Many will dig no deeper; others will, and in the process may gain a greater appreciation of the older players and their world.

Within the North Carolina scene, the use of old-time music as a mechanism for advancing the bandmembers' personal search for community and meaning exemplifies the small-group artistic expression that Dan Ben-Amos has defined as the essence of folklore. The various "North Carolina albums" are thus field recordings of a sort. They document folk revival practice in action by preserving the informal playing of a distinctive "folk group"—the young, educated traditional music emulator. Over the course of the next generation those albums became legendary sources for non-professional, jam-loving old-time music fans. People who never enjoyed access to Southern traditionalists could learn their tunes—ostensibly "played right"—through the LPs of these devoted acolytes. In Stockholm in 1977, fiddler Bill Hicks found Fuzzy Mountain's debut album in the living room of a Swedish fan of American folk music. During a 1990 trip to Dublin, Sharon Sandomirsky, guitarist on the Fuzzies second record, joined a jam devoted to nothing but the Fuzzy Mountain repertoire. The tunes themselves have become old-time standards and Henry Reed is now a traditionalist icon.[15]

A different branch of revivalism places a premium on conscious professionalism, public performance, adaptation and innovation. In the 1970s The Highwoods String Band illustrated this approach in the context of old-time music. The band attained widespread folk-world popularity playing colleges and festivals between 1972 and 1978. In the early

1990s, more than a decade after the group broke up, it became the subject of a hotly contested struggle over meaning and value in musical revivalism. To best understand Highwoods one needs to first step back and recall The New Lost City Ramblers, undoubtedly the pre-eminent revival string band of the great boom. As a "first generation" revival band, the Ramblers took seriously the need to credit their sources, demonstrate explicitly their respect for their musical forebears and educate their audiences about the range of southern traditional music. Unlike Hollow Rock and Fuzzy Mountain, the Ramblers were a diversified stage band. Typical performances included, in the words of historian Philip F. Gura, "full string-band sounds, banjo solos, banjo-fiddle duets, unaccompanied ballads, early commercial country music," Cajun numbers and bluegrass. Generally performing in dress vests, starched white shirts and creased slacks, the Ramblers offered an educational experience as well as a highly musical one. "The way the NCLR executed their program, and brought it to concert audiences," Gura writes, "was a curious mixture of stage show, illustrated lecture, academic and creative folklore, corny country jokes and complicated patter improvised on the spot. . . It was an odd combination of seriousness, antiquity, intensity, and hilarity."[16]

Though they were intensely active during the boom, the Ramblers performed infrequently in the seventies. In that decade it was Highwoods that carried the old-time flame to stages around the world. Echoing Peter Stampfel's description of the Holy Modal Rounders, Highwoods' fiddler Walt Koken explained that his band wanted "to take the old-time tunes and songs which had prevailed in the Appalachian region for over 100 years before being swamped into oblivion by modern day media and pop music, and present them as a dynamic art form to the American public."[17] Highwoods' genesis lay in

Berkeley, California during the late 1960s, when the thriving countercultural scene drew Koken, Mac Benford and Bob Potts from disparate parts of the country. Koken and Benford, who had met previously during sojourns to Union Grove, drew their initial inspiration from the Kingston Trio. Despite arrangements that "missed a lot of the real power and beauty that old-time music really had," the Trio, in Benford's words, "were the first clue that there was something different" from the even blander pop music of the fifties. Adds Koken, recounting an epiphany similar to that of Spark Gap's Rossi, "I played Kingston Trio music because that's what I heard, but when I heard something better—more soulful, much more beautiful, I wanted to play that." Joined at times by a shifting aggregation of accompanists, Benford, Koken and Potts—playing banjo and twin fiddles, respectively—began busking on the streets of Berkeley, eventually dubbing themselves The Fat City Stringband. Though Fat City played coffeehouses and festivals along the west coast, most of their performing occurred on the streets where spare change constituted a considerable portion of their limited income.[18]

At the time, the often-rigid rules of the boom had broken down. Emerging free-form radio blended genres to an extraordinary degree. Rock groups such as The Band and The Grateful Dead borrowed openly from America's traditional repertoire. It was an era, Benford recalled, when "it was just kind of 'open your ears, boys and girls, there's a big world out there.' It was a real interesting time for music, because everybody was looking for something 'far out' that would take them to a new place, a whole new set of experiences." It was also a time when youthful California audiences wanted to lose themselves in dance, in the carnivalesque style of the day. Playing on the streets forced the members of Fat City to learn how to entice and hold an audience that had not come

specifically to hear them, had not paid admission and was free to wander away without offering a single dime. To capture this audience the band played old-time music with a driving rock and roll energy. One early fan was Mike Seeger of The New Lost City Ramblers. "The first time I heard that trio," he recalled, "I thought it was the most amazing thing I'd heard, rhythmically." Unlike the Ramblers, Fat City eschewed the more didactic trappings of the boom. It did not stand before listeners and conduct mini-educational seminars on solo fiddle styles or unaccompanied singing. Band members did not offer history lessons recounting musical transitions. They did not wear costumes—neither the hillbilly wear that would have transformed them into cartoons nor the reverential business wear of the Ramblers. They dressed, instead, like themselves and their audience, in the jeans and flannel shirts favored by most other Berkeley hippies. If this was a "costume," at least it was that of their own extended cultural clan.[19]

In the fall of 1971 Fat City split up, worn out from close quarters, itinerant performing and poverty. Koken went to Ithaca, NY, where he renewed a friendship with Cornell student Doug Dorschug and met Dorschug's friend Jenny Cleland. Dorschug, a Connecticut native who played guitar and banjo, had discovered old-time music through a fairly typical path for a young northerner, one that wound from Burl Ives, Pete Seeger and The Kingston Trio to the southern radio stations that reached northward at night. Cleland, a newcomer to old-time, was a multi-instrumentalist who had enjoyed the great boom through square dancing and high school hootenannies. In short order, the three formed a band. It was not much longer before Koken coaxed Potts and Benford—now living in San Francisco and Maryland, respectively—back into the fold. Cleland's acoustic bass and Dorschug's guitar added a booming rhythm to the banjo and twin

fiddles of the original trio. After rehearsing at Benford's home the newly formed quintet took to the road. Wanting to avoid confusion with an east coast band also called Fat City, they re-christened themselves, drawing from a line in an old Charlie Poole song, "Gonna go to the high woods when I die." Commenting on the change, Mike Seeger said, "In those years, that presented a wonderful image. It was the drug years—'High.' And 'woods' made it feel like out in the country."[20]

Highwoods began touring with a commercial sophistication that had been foreign to Fat City. Old-time performer and music critic Kerry Blech, in a retrospective remembrance, writes that the bandmembers had "great individual talent and vitality that coalesced as a throbbing entity on stage. They were exciting, they were having fun, and they showed it." Irwin and Leighton met Koken in Ithaca and Rounder ultimately released three Highwoods albums between 1973 and 1976, which helped the band spread its music and secure gigs. Bluegrass Unlimited reviewed all three records favorably, noting that the band had the "uncommon ability to maintain on an album the same electricity that can charge up their live performance." By being their hippie selves, Highwoods forged a special connection with their audience, reaching listeners who would not have readily embraced either costumed "professionals," academic tutors or genuine southern traditionalists. "By gum, they were us up there on that stage," writes Blech. "It was as if they had stepped right out of the audience."[21] The bandmembers fostered this connection after their shows ended, developing a reputation as hard partiers who were always willing to keep the festivities going until sleep overcame them, an inevitability that often occurred in the homes of fans. Their energetic performances, quality records and easy accessibility led to an enduring influence within the relatively small world of

committed old-time revivalists. Seeger considers Highwoods "the most important" old-time band of their day. "They encouraged and inspired their generation and younger to take up old-time music," he says. Musician Brad Leftwich praises the "documentary efforts of scholars" but argues that Highwoods was more helpful in demonstrating that old-time music was a "living tradition." "Not only did Highwoods inspire legions of old-time musicians to form flannel-shirted, twin fiddle bands, their success gave dozens of those bands the itch to perform. Whether or not they scratched that itch," he adds, "many Highwoods fans have continued to play old-time music for fun."[22]

Recognition brought Highwoods high-profile appearances at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife and the long-running National Folk Festival, along with participation in a State Department-sponsored goodwill tour of Central and South America. Such bookings suggest a fair measure of acceptance from those charged, officially, with responsibility for promoting traditional artistry. However, in the mid-1970s a change in the government's arts policy altered the band's fortunes. In 1974, as the public folklore movement gathered steam, Jabbour became head of the new Folk Arts Program within the National Endowment for the Arts, responsible for funding traditional artistic expression. As the proprietors of a "teeny pot of money," he and his colleagues contemplated how best to distribute their limited bounty. They confronted a world in which much of the public associated the word "folk" with revival pop groups such as Peter, Paul and Mary. Those within high art circles considered "folk art" the province of the untrained and sometimes associated it with sub-par technical standards. Neither understanding encompassed an appreciation of artistry that was culturally specific, maintained traditionally and without thought of monetary reward, and often of high

quality. Given extremely limited funds, newly appointed government officials concluded that they best met their responsibilities by funding those artists who learned more-or-less traditionally within the communities from which their art arose. Using the organic and pastoral metaphors still common when discussing folklife, Jabbour says today that this decision sprang from a desire to fund the "roots," in the hope that the 'branches" would thrive as well. Mindful of government funding trends, the private, non-profit National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) followed suit. In 1976 Joe Wilson—no relation to Rounder's Mark Wilson—became director of the organization and he and his board, which organized the National Folk Festival, revamped its booking policy. There was, he says, "a major policy change, and it amounts to more than withdrawing the annual invitation to Highwoods. Basically, it was a decision to put more emphasis upon the traditional, to get as close to the original as possible, to present the rare rather than the commonplace."[23]

Highwoods banjoist Benford bristled at the change. While proud of his influence among his peers, he insisted that older southerners who grew up with early country music also embraced the band. "Our music . . . obviously took them back to times and places in their own pasts," he said, "and they were good about expressing their gratitude. It was their conviction that we were keeping something they valued alive that convinced us we were an authentic part of the tradition." Moreover, he maintained that southern musicians such as North Carolina fiddler Tommy Jarrell and Kentucky banjoist Roscoe Holcomb, elders whom staunch traditionalists revered, had gone "out of their way to let us know we had been accepted into the 'family'." In Benford's view, folklorists failed to understand the significance of this acceptance and persisted in saying that the band was "outside the

tradition, because we weren't born into it." In an interview published in 1979, he elaborated:

> Well, I've been playing old-time music for almost 20 years now, and I think that's enough time to develop a feel for it. It has to do with an attitude, not where you were brought up. History will show that we were an important link in that tradition. After a generation or so, this music is finally being revived by younger people in the South. And they didn't learn it from their parents—they learned it from the records of the Highwoods String Band. The tradition needed a spur from outside the culture in order to keep that culture alive. But the folklorists haven't figure that out yet. We never thought it would be this difficult to get across.[24]

In 1989, more than 10 years after Highwoods disbanded, Benford revisited this controversy in the pages of the Old-Time Herald. There, he castigated those cultural gatekeepers—Joe Wilson among them—who, in his view, "describe a world that simply does not exist in real life anymore. People can no longer be born into culturally distinct, isolated geographic areas. [Such areas] just don't exist. We are now all part of the homogenized blend, like it or not."[25] Wilson penned a blistering response, also published in the pages of the Herald. Not an academic folklorist, he took pains to disassociate himself from any theoretical school, grounding his argument in his own leaning toward the "roots." "Are we [at the NCTA] singular in preferring the rare?" Who, he asked, would prefer to see a copy of the Parthenon as opposed to the splendor of the Athenian original? Wilson cited three reasons for his preference, each of which he shares with Rounder's Mark Wilson. The first is a call for quality. "You can see everything else labeled folk," he wrote, "but it is hard to see the originals." The second is a call for justice, stemming from his belief that it is the obscure originals who are truly in need of promotional aid. Professional musicians, he argued, are well equipped to care for

themselves. They may have reasonable complaints regarding the commercial world within which they work, "but there is no special case for advocacy in them." Finally, he resists the standardization that he considers the inevitable result of the purely commercial realm. Most so-called "folk" events, he believes, "have dropped the less evolved in favor of artists who are of the revival or, more likely, popular. All pressure on those who present is to make everything look and sound like everything else. . . Then the event looks like all the rest and is boring and dies without anyone noticing."[26]

At the root of Wilson's preference is a highly personal class-based belief in equity for the voices of those largely unheard. Like Mark Wilson, he criticizes revivalists for treating songs and styles as fungible artifacts that anyone can reproduce and sell. He understands that this process is inevitable and he considers many revivalists to be sincere and skilled musicians, but he does not embrace their cause as his own. Born during the depression in eastern Tennessee, and raised in lower-class circumstances, Wilson claims to represent those relative unknowns who labor for a living, while making music on the side because they find meaning in its connection to community. In response to those who note that there are few, if any, musicians remaining who are free of popular influences, Wilson disclaims any interest in an idealized authenticity of style and repertoire. "Purity I'm not seeking. The last truly pure person was Queen Victoria's corset maker and she's been gone for a while. But nevertheless there are things that come from a little closer to the bone. Superficial people will never understand depth. It’s not in their making to understand depth. They’re not going to go there." Of the many revivalists who market themselves within the Folk Alliance, he says:

> Tradition, as seen from a Folk Alliance perspective, doesn't have much deep tradition in it. It's mainly people who have learned styles, and are reproducing those kinds of things, and I think that's OK. If you're raised out in the mainstream, and it's a little bit polluted, and you hear something from a crystal spring somewhere, and you want to get closer to that, it's OK to wiggle in that direction. But it's not the same as the deeper thing, the thing that comes from the working folks with the sweat on them and all of it—it's not exactly the same. I come from far enough up the creek to where I recognize that. Marketing defines a lot of this. The people who are skilled at marketing are the people you hear of. They're the people who make the money because that's their purpose. And God bless them, fine for them. They can go into business and do whatever they want to do, but they don't necessarily need my hillbilly ass to help them. There's some other folks that I'm interested in. I've had to sort out my work.[27]

Though admirable, Wilson's commitment to the unknown community musician conveys the impression that all revivalists are guilty of egregious cultural plunder. It is a divide reminiscent of the Dorson/Botkin debates of the 1950s and, in the spirit of that earlier controversy, the Benford/Wilson dispute prompted an outpouring of anguished commentary in the pages of the Old-Time Herald. Much of this came from revivalists, presumably because they felt under attack and perhaps, as Wilson might be quick to point out, because they are the ones who read the magazine. Herald associate editor and one-time Fuzzy Mountain fiddler Bill Hicks noted that Wilson sought to "crush and pulverize" not only Benford but also "probably 90 percent of this magazine's readership." While most commentators condemned Wilson, one, Nat Clark of Hartford, CT, was sympathetic. Though identifying himself with revivalists, he wrote, "I feel it is unwise for us to confuse [revivalist] coat-tail riding with real tradition." Folklorists, he added, "study forms of music that have existed for centuries without commercial exploitation and one doubts that Wilson is the only one who refuses to buy the idea that it is their job to help

revivalists be successful." Clark's description of the folklorist's mission was not wholly consistent with modern theory, but his—and Wilson's—commitment to those on the margins of entrepreneurial activity was rooted in the discipline's earliest focus.[28]

Unlike Clark, the majority of commentators disagreed with Wilson. Some found him guilty of the excessive romanticism that he criticized in others, and noted that several revered "traditional" musicians were also doctors, lawyers and savvy self-promoters. In response to Wilson's contention that Benford could have integrated himself into rural southern culture more fully had he chosen to spend 25 years residing on Pipers Gap Road near Galax, Virginia, Pipers Gap resident Joe Coffey described that very roadway. "If you drive down [it] today," he wrote, "you will see a stretch of suburbia/exurbia pretty typical of anywhere in the country. There are only two log houses between here and the Blue Ridge Parkway, both recently built and out of my price range. Not a tarpaper shack in the whole ten-mile stretch." By far, the critique voiced most often was that Wilson saw division where most musicians, whether revivalists or authentic traditionalists, saw none. New Lost City Rambler Tracy Schwarz expressed the prevailing sentiment, noting that the "old masters" whom he had encountered over roughly thirty years of performing always gave freely to both folklorists and revival musicians perhaps, he speculated, because they recognized "the importance of the moment," when the interest of devotees rendered obvious the value of their art.[29]

Herald editor Hicks argued that many of the more musically skilled southern traditionalists embraced the opportunities that revivalists offered. He pointed to Tommy Jarrell, the elderly North Carolina fiddler, banjoist and singer whom Wilson cited as one of the "originals" entitled to respect. Alan Jabbour, when still a graduate student,

provided Jarrell with his earliest opportunities to perform outside his community. At the time Jarrell had recently retired after spending 40 years engaged in highway construction for the state of North Carolina. Widowed, with grown children, and in possession of a pension and secure health insurance, Jarrell relished his musical career. In addition to his work with Jabbour, he toured with Blanton Owen of Fuzzy Mountain and with Mike Seeger, jammed with Mac Benford, and performed under the sponsorship of Joe Wilson. He was, Hicks wrote, a "spell-binding entertainer" who "damn well knew it," and he used his revival connections to build the second career that brought him immortality within the universe of old-time musicians. In Hicks' view, Wilson's own discussion of Jarrell demonstrated the mutuality inherent in the revivalist/traditionalist relationship. A few months before Jarrell's death, Wilson found the elderly fiddler in a reflective mood. Despite his age, Jarrell explained, he was not lonely, thanks to his many musical visitors. He then offered the names of the handful of advocates who, in Wilson's words, "made him available to all the rest." Wilson did not identify those whom Jarrell named—an omission that Hicks noted pointedly—but he described them as those "who recorded [Jarrell's] music and put it in the hands of players everywhere, those who took him west and north to concerts and festivals, those who made his movie, all who gave something back to this most generous man." As he thought of these benefactors, Jarrell reportedly told Wilson, "Not a goddamn thing would have happened without them."[30]

As a young government official in the 1970s, compelled to safeguard the meager funds at his disposal, Jabbour was once among those who drew hard lines between "authentic" and "imitative" musicians. Today, he rejects that approach, which he characterizes as the work of bureaucrats—presumably including himself—who analyzed

scholarship "and then tried to quantify it into formulas." Jabbour does not turn scholarship aside but he urges lovers of vernacular culture to keep it in perspective. The word "folk," he believes, has been of tremendous importance in spotlighting hidden portions of our cultural arena. It remains a helpful term if used carefully by those who understand its nuances, but Jabbour cautions against investing any word, whether it be "folk," "tradition," or "revivalist," with inordinate power. Once a word is too sharply defined, he says, there is a tendency to use it to exclude. He saw this with young musicians who fell in love with the fiddling of Henry Reed and Tommy Jarrell, only to find their musical involvement ghettoized by those who told them, "well, you're not really folk, you're a revivalist." Then, he observed, those condemned “react with wounded anger, and you’re then into a world of antagonism and bad blood. Well, that’s not doing anybody any good, culturally."[31]

To those who would dismiss Jabbour's argument as the special pleading of one who is himself an aggrieved revivalist, he offers the case of Frank George. A native West Virginian born in 1928, George grew up with older southern tunes. He was, however, at most only one generation older than the young revivalists who began heading south in the 1960s. Meeting these visitors at fiddling contests, George delighted in simultaneously sharing his knowledge with and learning from those whom he considered simply fellow musicians. Developing an interest in Scottish music, he studied the bagpipes, the pennywhistle and the fife, marking himself as a traditionalist with respect to his "own" music but a revivalist with respect to the music of others. On a personal level, people responded well to George, who was passionate about music and fun to be around. Still, demonstrating that cultural prejudice can run in every direction, some revivalists of the

era considered this particular native West Virginia fiddler to be less authentic than his elders. Authentic traditionalists, to borrow Bill Nowlin's self-aware characterization of George Pegram, "fit all the stereotypes." They were old, eccentric and noticeably different from their urban admirers. Frank George was none of these things. He was too young and he looked too much like his visitors. His wide-ranging curiosity and unwillingness to pigeonhole musical styles made him, in the eyes of some, too cosmopolitan to serve as an exemplar of regional traditionalism. George was thus caught betwixt and between those who sought an idealized authenticity and those willing to portray themselves as idealized authentics. [32]

Jabbour bemoans such false binary distinctions, which allow for the unfortunate dismissal of both a Frank George and a Mac Benford. Instead he urges a focus on what he considers cultural reality, which finds those unfamiliar with a tradition—whatever their background—learning from those who are more familiar, thus helping to move the tradition forward. For those in the act of discovery, the journey is one form of "creative rebellion" against mainstream culture. For the teachers, it is a way to "hoist the flag until someone comes along to pick it up." Jabbour values the conscious preservation of older musical styles. "Maybe," he says, "it takes a little conscious maintenance for a generation or so to wait and see what the next generation is going to do." He also values musical innovation, no matter who is doing the innovating. Through his years as a public folklorist, he has noticed an "odd rhythm of obsolescence followed by revival that occurs in so many traditions." Drawing on his own experience in North Carolina, he believes that revivalists can play an important role in this process. Many of the older musicians he encountered were concerned that their own grandchildren had little interest in their

region's vernacular tunes. They accepted the attention of young revivalists with pride and pleasure. Henry Reed, he said, considered Jabbour a traditional fiddler and Reed's family claimed that Jabbour played "more like dad than anybody." This, Jabbour maintains, exemplifies a cultural interchange that has always existed and which demands recognition and respect. People, he says, "have always been multi-cultural, subject to multiple cultural influences from all directions." As a result of this interchange, he says, it is no longer necessary to characterize the modern interest in old-time music as a revival. That music, he maintains, is now known all across America and it has itself influenced other forms of music.[33]

Jabbour's approach seeks factional reconciliation. It does not compel criticism of Joe and Mark Wilson's commendable desire to spotlight those who are otherwise unlikely to gain deserved attention. Nor does it dismiss those well-meaning people whose only crime is to so admire a form of artistry that they seek to emulate it. Instead, it urges acknowledgement of the mutual benefits of cultural exchange. One-time Fuzzy Mountain banjoist Tom Carter describes such benefits well in recalling his own North Carolina experience.

> We gave the [local traditional] musicians a great deal. We gave them something by constantly showing up, in a sense, renewing their lives and giving them a certain recognition in their own community. But we took a lot too. We took a part of their world and made it our own. There were some revivalists who fully adopted the rural lifestyle, but most of us took only what we needed and that was the music. We took the tunes and turned them into power. In this way, the music helped us acquire prestige in our own circles . . .[34]

Accommodation between preservationists and innovators, between revivalists and staunch champions of original sources, may lie in the self-awareness displayed by Carter. In expressing his irritation with The Highwoods String Band, Joe Wilson recounts a conversation he had with Benford in which the banjoist purportedly said that he just wanted to earn a living from performance, like the members of The Skillet Lickers did in the 1920s. Dismayed by the statement, Wilson notes that the musicians Benford cited also worked as farmers and mechanics and one—the blind Riley Puckett—sometimes performed alone on the street, seeking alms in a tin cup. To cure Benford and his ilk of their "romantic vision," Wilson, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, advocates that revivalists adopt the day jobs, as well as the tunes, of the musicians they emulate. Whether or not his reaction truly reflects the context of Benford's remark, Wilson seems most offended by those revivalists who, in his view, equate themselves with their sources. "What's the purpose," he asks, "of trying to become what you are not?" By contrast, he speaks well of Bruce Molsky, a New York City-bred performer with whom Wilson has worked. Playing fiddle, banjo and guitar, along with his occasional singing, Molsky—who has also recorded for Rounder—is among the most industrious professionals on the old-time revival scene and one who, Wilson says with approval, "knows exactly who he is."[35]

Molsky, born in 1955, is a Cornell-educated civil engineer raised in The Bronx. At one time, resistant to the idea of categorization, he hated being called a revivalist. He accepts it now as the inevitable offshoot of leading a public life in association with a particular interest group. In his younger days, he says, "I was a hippie. I wanted to not be like anybody else, so what I ended up being was just like another group of people." He concedes readily that the great boom influenced his style and the shape of his career. It is

the vehicle that exposed him to old-time music. It created, he says, an entire cluster of people who define themselves by the nature of the art they admire. He sees vestiges of the boom in many of the venues he plays, adding with a smile that this may be because "many of them haven't been able to afford to renovate since the sixties." Though he has met and played with several older southern musicians whom revivalists consider authentic "source" performers, his earliest old-time influences were recordings and his Cornell-based friendship with the members of Highwoods. A Rounder album entitled Parkersburg Landing was a significant influence, one that he shares with many other old-time fiddlers. This 1975 release contains then 30-year-old home recordings by the late Ed Haley, a previously unknown Kentuckian whom many musicians praise as one of the greatest traditional southern fiddlers. Speaking of Haley's impact, Molsky says, "[we revivalists] have our top ten, and recordings come out and we all jump on ‘em when we learn music. There’s a finite set of old source material that’s out there so everybody’s always got their nose in the air, and when somebody like Ed Haley comes along, you know, it’s natural we all jump on that stuff."[36]

Molsky grounds his work in a personal desire to celebrate the culture of the powerless, a motivation that he shares with the Wilsons though he manifests this desire through his own cultural borrowing. "Poor Man's Troubles" is the name of a fiddle tune but Molsky, a man with considerable economic options, made it the title of his 2000 Rounder album as a personal tribute to the poor people who gave birth to the music he loves. He sees his concern for the impoverished as an outgrowth of his own political stance, which is influenced in part by his absorption in the pluralist ethos of the great boom. Molsky called one of his early musical groups "Big Hoedown." Mulling over the

word "hoedown," the old term for a rural dance, he says, it's "a good word. At the end of a hard workweek, people put their hoe down. It's a very stark kind of reality, or my romantic notion of it is a very stark reality; you work hard and you play hard." Attuned to the possibility of excessive romance and realizing that people might find his claimed affinity to be an exploitive absurdity, he carries on, attesting to Joe Wilson's observation that he knows who he is.[37]

In performance Molsky bears Wilson out still further. He dresses with casual convention. Give him a stereotypical pocket protector and he could be an engineer once again, hard at work on a "casual Friday." There's no cowboy hat, no string tie, no vest or overalls. "I'm not a costume kind of guy," he says. Rooting among his musical paraphernalia while on stage in Austin, Texas, he makes a joking reference to the cell phone and Palm Pilot lying in an instrument case. Asked about that later, he shrugs. These are a part of his life—tools that help him stay organized while on the road. Then, he adds:

> Part of my desire to put this old music on the map is giving it some meaning in the present, and I want people to see the fact that I use a cell phone and a Palm Pilot, because they do too. And it makes it OK. That makes me a window for them into something that they might not have so much access to. They don't have to feel like it's incongruous to drive a brand new car and go in a fancy office and work on a computer all day and then come home and listen to scratchy old recordings. You know, one thing does not preclude the other. It makes sense to me. It's how I lead my life. I want people to see folk music as not something that's dead that's trying to be revived. The Irish music scene is the greatest example of that because it's alive and vital and young musicians are treated with great respect, because people know that they're going to be old musicians someday. . . So, I'd like for people to see this as more of a continuum.[38]

The construct of a continuum is important to Molsky. He believes that strict stylistic preservation is fine but understands that such efforts clash inevitably with the drive for innovation and the desire for one's own voice that are common to all great musicians. He knows that attempts to preserve tend to focus upon one moment frozen in time and often on one musician. He understands that many revered traditionalists were themselves great innovators and cultural borrowers. The revered Ed Haley, for example, traveled widely through the Appalachians, soaking up local vernacular styles as well as mass culture, which influenced him on an ongoing basis. "Listen to his playing sometime," says Molsky, "and listen to all those damn triplets in there. And then you do a little research and you find out that he was a real fan of ragtime, so that music made its way into his playing. That was pop music of his day. And then you look a little bit more and you realize that a lot of the pop music styles had influence on the traditional musicians. They didn't care. They knew the history of what they were doing, they knew the sources, but any musician lets what's interesting creep into their music, whether they want it to or not. Listen to all the kind of ragtime [and] Dixieland chord progressions that made their way into old-time fiddle tunes . . . That wasn't there [in those tunes] in the nineteenth century."[39] In playing with older southerners, Molsky has found that so long as a traditional tune remains recognizable most are quite happy to innovate. Indeed he has known some who play traditional tunes in two ways, one old and one new. Haley possessed a vast repertoire of traditional tunes but delighted in surprising his audience. "I like to flavor up a tune," he reportedly said, "so that nobody in the world could tell what I'm playing." To Molsky that willingness to innovate separates staunch preservationists—

whether they are traditional performers or revivalists—from true musicians, who always play "the music in the moment, in the present, in the context of their own life."[40]

At the center of Poor Man's Troubles, an album dominated by tunes from an older rural south, lies Molsky's own composition "Brothers and Sisters." He derived this polyrhythmic guitar solo from the choral singing of the Zimbabwe National Choir, which he heard on a 1967 album entitled Africa in Revolutionary Music. He has incorporated the tune into his stage show and senses no disapproval from his fans. As a working performer Molsky contemplates how far he may safely travel from the expectations of his audience. He has concluded that whatever appeal he possesses does not come from strict fidelity to a particular style nor from any effort to pretend that he exemplifies the culture of a region not his own. Instead it comes from an authenticity of self. It comes from his willingness to present himself as what he is—a native northerner, an urbanite, an educated man, a skilled musician, a concerned citizen—who finds in old-time music one source of beauty, artistic challenge and the opportunity for an implicit socio-political expression that he considers personally meaningful.

> I have to just trust my gut that what ties together a lot of the music in my show is me, [my particular] musical approach and personality. There's a lot of polyrhythm in my fiddling so playing a polyrhythmic African guitar piece is not that far afield, if you look at it that way. If you look at it in terms of people's expectations— 'Well, this guys a fiddler, what's he doing playing African music?'—yeah, it doesn't make sense. But I don't care about that. Nobody's complained and I'm always interested in hearing what people have to say about it. What I'm trying to do is develop a show that includes traditional music without compromising it but also couching it in some things that might be a little bit more accessible or interesting or unexpected. Unexpected is good.[41]

Anthropologist Michael F. Brown, following a lengthy examination of "cultural borrowing" in various contexts, cautions against the tendency to take "too rigid a view of cultural ownership, especially when technological and social changes are making cultural boundaries ever harder to identify." In pluralist societies, he argues, such rigidity constrains creativity and creates antagonists. None of us, he suggests, would want to live in "a world ruled solely by proprietary passions." In articulating what I call an authenticity of self, Bruce Molsky appears to embrace the essence of Brown's warning. By looking backward, moving forward, and shaping his own artistic vision, he bridges the divide between Joe Wilson and Mac Benford. He helps shorten the years and span the geographic distance between the experiences of the long-gone Ed Haley and those of all the old-time musicians who have followed him, whether they are rich or poor, northerner or southerner. He offers an approach with the potential to knit diverse revival factions together in a world ruled not by proprietary passions but by shared joys.[42]

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[1] I. Sheldon Posen, "Author's Introduction" to "On Folk Festivals and Kitchens: Questions of Authenticity in the Folksong Revival," in Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg, 127, 129 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[2] Mark Wilson, interview by author; information on Edward Crain from Jeff Place, "Supplemental Notes on Selections," in the liner notes to the audio recording Anthology of American Folk Music, Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, p. 43 (this is the 1997 CD reissue of the 1952 release). For another interview with Wilson see Kerry Blech, "In the Field—An Interview with Mark Wilson," Old-Time Herald, Winter 2000/01, 12.

[3] Mark Wilson, interview by author.

[4] Mark Wilson, "The North American Traditions Series: Its Rationale," from the Rounder Records Homepage at <http://www.rounder.com/series/nat/nat_rat1.html> (accessed 2 March 2005).

[5] Mark Wilson, interview by author.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Introduction by Mark Wilson," liner notes to the audio recording Kentucky Old-Time Banjo, Rounder CD 0394.

[8] Mark Wilson, interview by author; "Autobiographical Sketch Of Buddy Thomas," liner notes to the audio recording Kitty Puss: Old-Time Fiddle Music from Kentucky, Rounder CD 0032 (released originally on LP in 1976).

[9] Mark Wilson, interview by author.

[10] Philip F. Gura, "Some Thoughts on the Revival: Alan Jabbour and Old-Time Music," Old-Time Herald, Summer 1991, 24.

[11] Thomas Carter, "Looking For Henry Reed: Confessions of a Revivalist," in Sounds of the South, ed. Daniel Patterson, 71, 81-82, (Chapel Hill, NC: The Southern Folklife Collection, 1991); Bill Hicks, "Where'd They Come From? Where'd They Go? A Brief History of the Fuzzy Mountain String Band," Old-Time Herald, Spring 1995, 20, 21.

[12] Hicks, "Where'd They Come From?" 21; Carter, "Looking," 85.

[13] Ken Irwin (C), interview by author.

[14] Richard Spottswood, "Record Reviews," Bluegrass Unlimited, October 1972, 11.

[15] Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," in Toward New Perspectives in Folklore, eds. Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman, 3-15 passim (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972); Bill Hicks, liner notes to the audio recording The Fuzzy Mountain String Band, Rounder CD 11571 (containing selections from the band's two early 1970s Rounder LPs).

[16] Philip F. Gura, "Roots and Branches: Forty Years of the New Lost City Ramblers, Part 2,"
Old-Time Herald, Spring 2000, 18, 23.

[17] Dick and Nancy Kimmel, "The Highwoods Stringband," People Into Music/Pickin', August 1978, 62, 63.

[18] Alice Gerrard, "Colby Street to New York and Points South: The Highwoods Stringband," Old-Time Herald, Summer 1992, 26, 27.

[19] Ibid., 27, 28.

[20] Mike Greenstein, "New York Stringbands: The Highwoods and Cranberry Lake," Bluegrass Unlimited, February 1979, 36, 38; Seeger quoted in Gerrard, " Colby Street," 30.

[21] Kerry Blech, liner notes to the audio recording Highwoods String Band, Feed Your Babies Onions, Rounder CD 11569. This CD compiles selected tracks from the Highwoods' three Rounder LPs from the 1970s. "Record Reviews," Bluegrass Unlimited, June 1976, 44-45; "Record Reviews," Bluegrass Unlimited, July 1978, 30 (the quotation comes from this review).

[22] Seeger quoted in Gerrard, "Colby Street," 30; Brad Leftwich, liner notes to Feed Your Babies Onions.

[23] Alan Jabbour, interview by author; Joe Wilson, "Confessions of a Folklorist," Old-Time Herald, Spring 1990, 25, 27; see also Alan Jabbour, "Issues in Old-Time Music," Old-Time Herald, Nov. 1993-Jan. 1994, 24, 25.

[24] Greenstein, "New York Stringbands," 37.

[25] Mac Benford, "Folklorists and Us: An Account of Our Curious and Changing Relationship," Old-Time Herald, Spring 1989, 25.

[26] Wilson, "Confessions," 27

[27] Joe Wilson, interview by author.

[28] Bill Hicks (letter to the editor), "Issues In Old-Time Music," Old-Time Herald, Summer 1990, 18; Nat Clark (letter to the editor), "Issues In Old-Time Music," Old-Time Herald, Fall 1990, 20.

[29] John Coffey (letter to the editor), "Issues In Old-Time Music," Old-Time Herald, Summer 1990, 19; Tracy Schwarz (letter to the editor), "Issues In Old-Time Music," Old-Time Herald, Winter 1989/1990, 27.

[30] Hicks (letter to the editor); Joe Wilson, "Confessions," 31.

[31] Alan Jabbour, interview by author.

[32] Ibid.; see also Gura, "Some Thoughts on the Revival."

[33] Alan Jabbour, interview by author.

[34] Carter, "Looking For Henry Reed," 86.

[35] Joe Wilson, "Confessions," 25; on Bruce Molsky: Joe Wilson, interview by author.

[36] Bruce Molsky, interview by author**.**

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid. The referenced performance took place at Austin's Cactus Cafe, on the night of October 12, 2000.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid. Haley quoted in Mark Wilson and Guthrie T. Meade, liner notes to the audio recording Parkersburg Landing, Rounder 1010.

[41] Bruce Molsky, interview by author**.**

[42] Michael F. Brown, Who Owns Native Culture? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 251-252.

7

JUST ONE MUSIC, FOR OUR PEOPLE
Seeking Essentials In Cajun Music And Zydeco

> . . . all them youngsters I want 'em to know, to follow their daddy's footsteps sometime, provided their daddy doing the right thing now. But see, I got my boy, he's moving on pretty good following my footstep. I'm teachin' him how to play accordion.—musician Clifton Chenier, The King of Zydeco[1]

The controversies that surround old-time music are by no means unique to that particular style. Whenever the public defines an art form by perceived cultural essentials, experimentation is controversial. The nature of resulting criticism tends to differ depending upon whether those experimenting are cultural outsiders or insiders. In extreme cases critics suggest that outsiders are akin to thieves, who exploit the treasures of others for their own undeserved benefit. Though lacking the harsh pejorative, this is the general nature of the criticism leveled against the Highwoods String Band, when some people suggested that the band was less entitled than others to certain performance opportunities. Arguably cultural insiders should be freer to experiment than outsiders. Insiders, after all, are part "owners" of the artistic heritage in question. No one can properly characterize their experiments as theft. Instead, those experiments are part of the process by which cultures evolve and create, as Glassie characterized it, the future out of the past. Nonetheless, given that traditions help people define identity, intra-cultural artistic experimentation remains controversial. Cultural advocates fear that it will diminish that which is special about aspects of heritage, thus diminishing those who share that heritage. Criticism can be especially harsh if experimentation occurs in the context of the popular music industry. Critics sometimes view experimentation in that context as

calculated manipulation directed toward self-interest, as opposed to organic evolution that reflects true community identity.

Most well-known professional Cajun music and zydeco performers are natives of the genres' Louisiana home. These styles thus provide useful vehicles for the examination of intra-cultural experimentation in the context of traditional artistry. Broadly speaking, these genres each consist of accordion-driven dance music that arose within the French-speaking community of western Louisiana. They derive from white and black musical traditions filtered through certain common aspects of heritage. Each encompasses historical and stylistic features that combine to give it a special cachet as folk music. These include an identification with historically oppressed groups, both white and black, the frequent use of a foreign tongue, a relatively enclaved origin within a small pocket of the American south, and a failure to sustain any extended mainstream commercial success. While these commonalities cause many among the general public to conflate the two forms, cultural advocates within Louisiana often distinguish them in an effort to define group identity and foster ethnic and racial pride. Disturbed by official and popular pronouncements that dub southwestern Louisiana as Cajun Country or Acadiana, which they see as an overt sign of western European, Caucasian dominance, some Louisiana blacks stress the unique nature of zydeco and lay claim to it as a black cultural form. In each case the incorporation of elements drawn from other ethnic and racial groups and from mass-mediated popular culture clouds the issue of cultural ownership. Given this complicated scenario, one must look backward toward stylistic origin and development to fully understand discourse surrounding Cajun and zydeco traditionalism and authenticity.[2]

In 1755, as part of an effort to assert dominion over North America, the British Crown expelled a large community of French immigrants who had settled in Port Royal, Acadia, in the Canadian Maritimes. Beginning in 1765, large numbers of Acadian refugees began arriving in French-owned southern Louisiana, where they supported themselves through farming, fishing and trapping. Others followed, in a pattern familiar among immigrant groups, until sheer numbers made the dispossessed Acadians the dominant southwest Louisiana ethnicity. Blacks entered the region as well, either as slaves of French landowners or as "free coloreds" who traveled from Haiti at the start of the nineteenth century, after it wrested independence from France. A typical process of cross-cultural exchange ensued as French-speaking whites and blacks shared traditions and sometimes bloodlines with one another and with other regional groups, among them Native-Americans, Spaniards, Germans and Scots-Irish.[3]

The term "Creole" originally described the relatively elite descendants of the region's aristocratic French and Spanish European immigrants. Later it came to mean "indigenous," differentiating those, whether white or black, who were born in the New World from those born elsewhere. In this context it applied to slaves as well as to white elites, a linguistic development that displeased the latter. French-derived whites sought to separate themselves from those they perceived as their racial inferiors. Most settled on "Cajun," a colloquial adaptation of Acadian, as a convenient self-descriptor, though those of a more formal bent sometimes use the term "French Creole." In common parlance the word Creole now refers to blacks and those of mixed race and some consider it a term of limitation, if not outright derision. New Orleans guitarist Boogie Bill Webb reportedly told folklorist Nick Spitzer "they call it Creole to keep the black boy from being a white

boy." Accordingly, some blacks prefer the more straightforward "French black" or, simply, "noir."[4]

Southwest Louisiana's earliest known vernacular music includes variants of unaccompanied ballads that survived from France. In the 1930s the Lomaxes recorded a selection of these sung by members of the Hoffpauir family from the town of New Iberia. By the time of this Lomax field trip, however, what commentators now call Cajun music had moved far beyond these early ballads. The fiddle, small and carried easily to the frontier, attained instrumental prominence by the late 1700s. According to folklorist Barry Ancelet, "a distinct twin fiddling style" developed, loud enough to energize the dancers at house parties. Even at this early stage the local vernacular attested to the range of regional influences, augmenting the French ballads with the jigs and reels enjoyed by Anglo neighbors, as well as waltzes and polkas, the influence of Germans and Czechs. In the mid to late 1800s, those German settlers brought the accordion to Louisiana. Its volume made it a favorite at dances and it soon relegated the fiddle to a secondary role. In 1928 Joseph Falcon solidified the instrument's identification with Cajun music by using it to accompany his own vocal in recording "Allons a Lafayette" for Columbia Records, the first commercially released Cajun recording. Over the next several years numerous record companies catering to regional tastes entered the Louisiana market, solidifying the essentials of what we now call Cajun music. The songs contained on these earliest recordings helped establish a basic vernacular repertoire, sung exclusively in French. Stylistically, this repertoire centered on high-pitched, emotional vocals and an accordion dominated instrumental lineup with accompaniment by fiddle, either triangle or washboard, and guitar.[5]

Blacks mixed local influences with their own Afro-Caribbean heritage. On their field trip in the thirties the Lomaxes recorded Louisiana blacks engaged in jure singing, named for the French verb "jurer," meaning to testify or swear. In jure, both secular and sacred themes are sung a capella to the accompaniment of shouts, handclaps and responsive verses by other singers. Alan Lomax considered the exultant polyrhythmic result "perhaps the principal musical style of West Africa and the West Indies," one ideal for "collective dancing." The jures he heard contain the first known recorded use of the common musical lament "les haricots sont pas sales," meaning "the snap beans are not salty" and are thus inedible, a reference to hard economic times. Gradually, musicians, promoters and scholars transliterated "les haricots" variously as zarico, zorico, zodico and, ultimately, zydeco, naming what became a commercial musical genre as well as the dances that feature such music, as in "Let's go to the zydeco." While the jures and French ballads illustrate the survival of older forms, many Depression-era blacks and whites performed the more modern music exemplified by Falcon's early recordings, and they sometimes performed it with one another. Black accordionist Amedee Ardoin, for example, made a series of influential records between 1929 and 1934 accompanied by white fiddler Dennis McGee. Musician and writer Ann Savoy claims expansively that Ardoin "laid the groundwork for Cajun music as we know it today." Ben Sandmel, while acknowledging Ardoin's influence, notes "there is strong debate today whether [his recordings] are appropriately classified as Cajun music or [the more black identified] zydeco." It is largely a manufactured controversy, motivated in part by the need to label music that is offered for sale. As Sandmel notes, those descriptors did not exist in the

thirties, when fans knew Ardoin, Falcon and other regional performers, both black and white, simply as purveyors of "French music."[6]

The early-twentieth century culture of southwest Louisiana—already internally variegated—collided inevitably with that of the larger world. The discovery of oil, the experience of military service during the First World War, better roads and the increasing ubiquity of electronic media increased cultural exchange in Louisiana, as it did everywhere. Beginning in 1916, state and local laws banned the use of French in public schools, ushering in an era when officials sometimes punished children who dared speak the language they used at home. Some embraced this harsh approach as a means to modernization. To well-meaning people who hoped for a better life for their children, being "French," meaning to embrace the old language and cultural trappings, became a stigma reserved for the less ambitious. Bigots embraced the word "coonass" to describe those Cajuns who did not appear sufficiently modern. The word, Ancelet explains, was a slur "synonymous with poverty and ignorance and [tantamount] to an accusation of cultural ignorance." By the late 1930s, one manifestation of this drive for advancement was a fascination with the products of Nashville's country music industry and the jazz-fueled western swing of Bob Wills. Like people everywhere, the Cajuns of Louisiana enjoyed mass-mediated popular culture. Cajun bands, such as the popular Hackberry Ramblers, began to feature drums and steel guitars. The fiddle re-emerged as a lead instrument, rising due to its identification with Wills and its ability to swing. A decade after its appearance on the first commercial Cajun record, the accordion receded, now identified with an older, suddenly outmoded sound referred to derisively as "chank-a-chank."[7]

Pendulums swing continuously, however, and even as the fiddle enjoyed its dominance, creative artists lay the seeds of an accordion resurgence. In 1948 accordionist Iry Lejeune recorded "Love Bridge Waltz" in Houston. The record was a huge regional hit and it sparked Lejeune's steady career on the Louisiana dancehall circuit, which helped revitalize his instrument. In 1955 an automobile struck and killed Lejeune but others helped bring the accordion back to the fore. Among them were the popular Nathan Abshire, who played with a bluesy drive, and Aldus Roger, who led tight, well-rehearsed dance bands from the 1950s into the 1970s. Roger's bands featured the now common drums and steel guitar and, in the words of his contemporary, musician Johnnie Allan, they presented a "loud . . . full force sound." The bandleader did not see himself as an innovator, however. Speaking to Ann Savoy, he said, "You can't make rock and roll with the French accordion. Play the French music like it's supposed to be, but don't make a rock and roll of it. That don't go."[8]

Others embraced modernity, or at least the idea of it. In 1952 Hank Williams, a non-Cajun, had a huge hit with "Jambalaya (On The Bayou)," a country song with Cajun inflections, a Louisiana theme and lyrics partially in French. Ethnic Cajuns sensed opportunity. In the fifties and early sixties native Louisianans Doug Kershaw and Jimmie C. Newman attained success in country music by capitalizing on their "exotic" background. Newman dubbed himself the Alligator Man and recorded tunes such as "Bayou Talk" and "Louisiana Saturday Night." Kershaw had a hit in 1961 with "Louisiana Man." Locally, accordionist Lawrence Walker, who fronted what was then considered a more-or-less traditional Cajun dance band featuring the now de rigueur steel guitar and drums, recorded "Lena Mae" and "Let's Rock and Roll Tonight," singing in

English and incorporating the sounds of early rock. The latter tune, also known as "Allons Rock and Roll," uses musical phrases from the well known "Rockin' Robin," which had been a national pop hit in 1958 for Bobby Day.

The vernacular music of southwest Louisiana blacks followed a similar path from so-called traditional to a modernity drawn from mass culture. In 1954 Wilson "Boozoo" Chavis, who grew up near Lake Charles, entered a recording studio at the behest of Eddie Shuler, owner of a small local label. Chavis was a 24-year-old farmer and horse breeder who played accordion at neighborhood dances, generally without any accompaniment other than his own foot, with which he stomped on a box. Hoping that Chavis might generate some local sales, Shuler paired him with Classie Ballou and the Tempo Toppers, a local rhythm and blues band. Chavis had never worked with a band and Ballou had no idea what the accordionist was trying to accomplish. It took three days of studio effort but they finally produced "Paper In My Shoe." The lyric, sung in both French and English, is a bit of doggerel from an old Black Creole folk tune. The Tempo Toppers backed the accordion with a heavy drumbeat, a saxophone and an electric guitar riff typical of early rock. Shuler initially considered the results unreleasable but he eventually tried to recoup some of his investment. He backed "Paper In My Shoe" with an instrumental salvaged from the session tapes that he dubbed "Boozoo Stomp." To everyone's surprise, the single became enough of a regional hit that Hollywood's Imperial Records licensed it, providing national distribution and selling, Shuler claims, over 100,000 copies. After touring the south, Chavis and Ballou returned to the studio. They could not produce another hit, however, and Chavis, who believed he had been cheated financially, returned to the anonymity of raising horses. In the mid-1980s he resurfaced as a recording artist with

albums on Louisiana's own Maison de Soul label and, later, Rounder. He also toured—this time as a legend credited with recording what aficionados now consider the first zydeco record.[9]

Zydeco illustrates once again how hard it is to pin down what folk music is. Though often characterized as a folk form, professional musicians seeking sales created zydeco from a union of traditional elements and commercial sounds, with the latter often dominant. As presented by the young Lake Charles horse breeder, it blended the accordion, the French language and Creole folk lyrics with electrified rhythm and blues and a modern, rocking beat. Writing on an internet discussion board, one contemporary fan, with at least a tinge of hyperbole, describes zydeco as "one part Basin Street, one part jug band, one part 50's rock, one part Dixieland, six parts Cajun, with a dash of reggae." Another refers to it as "Cajun with a lot more zest" and still another, reaching for the functional essence of this highly rhythmic dance music, describes it as being "like Cajun but with hot sweaty sex involved."[10] With Chavis's quick retreat it fell to Clifton Chenier to bring this developing genre to the world. The man later heralded as the "King of Zydeco" was born near Opelousas, Louisiana in 1925. He grew up listening to his father play the old Creole tunes at house parties. He started playing the accordion as a teenager and at 17 he began entertaining at dancehalls around Lake Charles, with his older brother accompanying him on washboard. They later moved to Texas where they worked in oil refineries and performed at dances along the Texas-Louisiana line. Exposed to a variety of popular music, he became an early fan of now legendary bluesmen such as Muddy Waters, Lightning Hopkins and Jimmy Reed.[11]

In 1954, the same year Chavis released "Paper In My Shoe," Chenier entered a Lake Charles radio station to record seven tunes, among them the instrumental "Louisiana Stomp," with his accordion accompanied by guitar, electric bass and drums. While Chavis played the small single-row button accordion that dated from the instrument's earliest days, Chenier played the newer triple-row piano accordion, which permitted a broader range of sound. Released on the Elko label, "Stomp" failed to sell. After a few more unsuccessful releases, Chenier attained a measure of fame in the late-fifties with Los Angeles's Specialty Records, which was then on the brink of enormous success with Little Richard. "Eh, Petite Fille," sung in French and English, mixed Chenier's accordion with bluesy piano runs, a rock beat and lyrics of teen angst ("Oh little girl, Oh you sure look fine, Oh little girl, I wish you were mine"). This vibrant rocker was a hit in several markets and made Chenier a star back home in southern Louisiana.[12]

Chenier could not produce another hit and this early stardom faded. In 1964, working without a band, he was playing bars in Houston when he met Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records. Strachwitz had come to Texas to record bluesman Lightning Hopkins, who introduced him to the accordionist. "I'd heard of Clifton," the label owner said later, "because I had a few of his Specialty 78s, but I considered that stuff R& B."[13] But when he heard Chenier playing older French dance tunes accompanied only by a drummer, he wanted to record him. The relationship began, however, with tension over style and repertoire. Chenier wanted to be popular and to him that meant recording rhythm and blues like his hero Ray Charles. Enmeshed in his quest to explore the roots of North America's diverse vernacular music, Strachwitz had no interest in this working-class black man's desire to move beyond his musical origins. To his ears, the "French music"

of Chenier's rural Louisiana was far more beautiful and meaningful than the contemporary rhythm and blues that he considered disposable jukebox fodder. For Chenier's Arhoolie debut, the first of more than a dozen albums he recorded for the label, the men reached a straightforward compromise. One half consisted of older French waltzes and two-steps, while the other focused on more contemporary sounds.[14]

By the early sixties, in the Louisiana dance halls where "French music" found its widest audience, Cajun and Black Creole musicians presented a wide ranging mélange in which accordion-based bands mixed elements of pop, rock, country and blues with the French language and a repertoire of older, arguably traditional lyrics and musical phrases. In the true spirit of professional entertainers, regional bands offered something for everyone. Given such a climate, it is fair to echo Aldus Roger's words, though not his apparent certainty, and ask precisely what Cajun music is "supposed to be." More specifically, in an atmosphere of such continuous change and diverse source material, how—and why—does one essentialize the Cajun and Black Creole musical traditions? Some might confine the concept of traditional to the a capella ballads and jures that are the most direct links to French and African antecedents. Others might focus on the earliest instrumental styles when fiddles dominated the dances on rural prairies and bayous. Some would assuredly fixate on the accordion, a relatively late arrival to the musical mix but one that dominated the music's earliest appearances on record, establishing it in the minds of many as the sine qua non of the southwest Louisiana sound. Still others might accept the steel guitar as a traditional element, given that so many Louisiana musicians have embraced it, making it a common feature in the instrumental line-up for roughly four generations. Some, given to a stricter analysis,

might see that same steel guitar as an intrusion from purely commercial sources, identifying it with the scramble of once self-loathing Cajuns to "modernize." To a considerable degree, these are the narrow concerns of scholars and revivalists intent on classifying the lived experiences of others. Michael Doucet, fiddler and frontman for the famed Cajun band BeauSoleil, perhaps best expresses the perspective of ordinary Louisiana music fans. Recalling his childhood in Scott, near Lafayette, in the late fifties, when he enjoyed musical gatherings among family and friends and watched Aldus Roger on local television, Doucet says, "In those days nobody separated [traditional and nontraditional] music. It was just one music—because it was for our people."[15]

This was the climate that confronted Ralph Rinzler when he visited Louisiana on behalf of the Newport Folk Festival in the sixties—a sincere, well-meaning outsider with an outsider's agenda, seeking the essence of a "tradition" that at best he could only glimpse. Years later, Rounder memorialized his efforts by releasing two albums of field recordings that stemmed from his several expeditions. The music on these LPs is consistent with Rinzler's relatively conservative aesthetic, leaning toward an older sound that largely eschews the swing, honky-tonk and rock and roll that Cajuns of the 1960s mixed routinely with their own regional music.[16] Among those the LPs spotlight is Dewey Balfa, the man who came to embody the late-twentieth century rejuvenation of Cajun culture in Louisiana and throughout the world. Born in 1927, Balfa, the fourth of nine children in a poor sharecropping family, grew up speaking French in the prairie town of Grand Louis. There, he explained, suggesting an early sense of separation from the mainstream, "We would see people speaking English, but we called them 'Americans.'" Balfa's father played fiddle, as did his father and his father before him.

Young Dewey acquired his first fiddle at about age ten and he soon joined family members in entertaining at community dances. They played music learned "from the family and from the community in which we were raised." "My family was a musical family as far back as I remember," he explains "and many of the songs were passed from generation to generation. We didn't have any contact with outside musicians so a lot of the songs we played were unknown to other musicians."[17] At 16 he left home. A stint in the Merchant Marine provided his first exposure to the world beyond Grand Louis. Returning to Louisiana after World War II, he discovered that local musicians were mixing traditional Cajun tunes with the Western swing that he had learned from fellow seamen.

Through the fifties and early sixties Balfa supported his growing family by working variously as a farmer, school bus driver, furniture salesman and insurance agent. He also performed steadily. As Dick Spottswood explains, "Dewey, down home, was working with a wonderful band—a bar band, a dance hall band—with drums and steel. He put a pick-up on his fiddle and Nathan Abshire was playing an amplified accordion—the whole thing. They had a honky-tonk band the same as anyone else." Simultaneously, he performed with family members as The Musical Brothers or, simply, The Balfa Brothers, focusing on twin fiddles and the early tunes they learned traditionally while growing up in Grand Louis. It was this connection to early traditions that caught Rinzler's ear when he invited several musicians—fiddler Gladius Thibodeaux, accordionist Louis LeJeune and Balfa, playing acoustic guitar—to entertain at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, the first of several Cajun ensembles to appear at the annual event. There "they performed the turn-of-the-century, unamplified music" that, in Barry Ancelet's words,

"made the Louisiana cultural establishment uneasy." An editorial in the Opelousas Daily World bemoaned the "dissonant squall" of Cajun music and worried about the image it imparted to the world outside. "All we can do," the paper fretted, "is sit back and wait for the verdict from Newport, scared stiff. I am not sure Cajun music is on trial in Newport. It may be us." Adverse reaction was not limited to real or imagined power brokers. Upon his return home Balfa found that many of his neighbors were angry with him for playing that old "chank-a-chank" to outsiders, exposing all of them to ridicule.[18]

Though some Cajuns may have been insecure about their place in the cultural firmament, northern revival audiences offered their more old-school musical representatives an overwhelmingly positive reception. Balfa, stunned and energized by this response, became a committed cultural warrior. He developed a reputation among revivalists as an ardent exponent of older musical forms, despite his more eclectic musical approach at home. Aided by funds from the Newport Foundation, he joined Rinzler and others in spearheading the Louisiana Folk Foundation, dedicated to the preservation of Cajun heritage, musical and otherwise. He urged local record man Floyd Soileau to record the Balfa Brothers performing older fiddle-dominated tunes. Soileau, a Cajun himself, had no interest in promoting musical traditions simply for the sake of preserving heritage. He initially resisted Balfa's entreaties, unable to see commercial potential in such a project. Eventually he agreed to release a single and, surprised by its local success, he followed that with an album.[19] Issued in 1965, The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music, known by its jacket color as "the yellow album," has become a revival classic. Spottswood recalls Tracy Schwarz, a member of the New Lost City Ramblers, "playing it for me and saying 'this is wonderful,' and it was." In 1968 Balfa

was part of an activist group that persuaded the state to fund the teaching of Cajun French at all levels of public education, 50 years after officials had banned use of the language within schools. It was the start of a renaissance that now finds Louisiana's state and local governments actively promoting Cajun heritage as a tool of economic development.[20]

This renaissance did not occur all at once, however, and it took time to get young people involved. A key figure in this regard is Michael Doucet. Born in 1951 to a musical and bilingual family, Doucet began playing trumpet, guitar and fiddle as a child. At home he heard "French music" while the local radio featured mainstream rock, pop and country. While a college student at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge he began an in-depth exploration of his Cajun heritage and eventually began performing some of the older tunes informally with friends. By 1974 he had become a self-described "militant" who "liked to hang out with the older guys and just speak French." In 1976 a French promoter approached Doucet and a few friends while they were playing Cajun tunes at a Louisiana bar and invited them to perform at a European folk festival. Years earlier, Peter Stampfel had imagined what it might be like if the musicians on Harry Smith's Anthology could be transported, unaged, to the sixties. While in France, Doucet had a real-life experience akin to Stampfel's fantasy. "Wow! [The French] knew about this music. . . It was like speaking to people of our great-grandfathers' era who were our age. It was the turning point of my life."[21] BeauSoleil was born on that trip when a French record label asked the informal group to record their traditional acoustic songs.

Back home Doucet moved in multiple directions. He continued to work with BeauSoleil, perfecting an older repertoire and style. Simultaneously he helped form Coteau, which some critics dubbed the Cajun Grateful Dead. That band was, Doucet once

said, "the first of its kind that even tried to assimilate Cajun music with rock and roll sung in French and be traditional at the same time."[22] Doucet recognizes that there is hyperbole in this statement, in that it fails to mention those Cajun musicians from the thirties through the fifties who incorporated the then revolutionary sounds of swing and early rock. Amending it, he says that Coteau was the first band to blend the aesthetic of 1970s rock music with traditional Cajun sounds. "It was," he says simply, "our turn."[23] Coteau managed to be both hip and deeply respectful of the past. Music critic Geoffrey Himes recalls the band "drawing big crowds of hippies and old-timers all along the Gulf Coast. Much of the repertoire," writes Himes, "was traditional French Louisiana material, but it was played with a rumbling rock beat and twin lead guitars that recalled the Allman Brothers more than the Balfa Brothers." It was a sound that suited the broad aesthetic of Rounder Records perfectly. Ken Irwin saw the band at the National Folk Festival and was "blown away" by their performance. He wanted to record them but Coteau was hoping for a major label contract that never materialized. The next year, at the same festival, between thirty and forty people approached the Rounder concession, hoping to find a Coteau album. Amazed that "so many" had remembered the group, Irwin grew eager to develop the Cajun side of Rounder's roster. Coteau, unfortunately, was not long-lived. Doucet wanted to delve more deeply into tradition, while other members followed what he refers to somewhat derisively as "the star trail." BeauSoleil has endured and, with Doucet at the helm, has gone on to explore both tradition and Cajun modernity.[24]

In the United States, time and change inevitably strain cultural identity. Entrepreneurs routinely try to capitalize on momentarily popular cultural symbols, diluting the meaning of those symbols in their quest for profit. In this climate, ethnic

loyalists strive to define and preserve that which they consider authentic elements of their heritage. Marc and Ann Savoy are among Louisiana's most visible and outspoken defenders of Cajun culture. In their prairie home near Eunice, which has been in Marc's family for generations, they live out a holistic cultural commitment that focuses not only on music but also on history, architecture, food and the French language. Ann, ironically, is not a native Cajun. She met Marc at a folk festival in her native Virginia and, since their 1976 marriage, she has enmeshed herself in his Cajun heritage. Falling in love with Marc led her to a life that exemplifies a sort of hyper-revivalism—a complete cultural immersion encompassing a physical and psychological relocation to the geographic heart of an admired culture. The Savoys are both musicians as well as self-taught Cajun historians. They operate the Savoy Music Center near Eunice, a combination retail store, community gathering place and workshop. There Marc builds his "Acadian" brand of the button accordion entirely by hand, for shipment to purchasers throughout the world.[25]

The music center hosts regular Saturday morning jam sessions that attract a steady stream of locals and tourists, instruments in hand. It is a friendly informal scene, but one conducted in accordance with Marc's strict aesthetic. He urges respect for community practices that have stood the test of time, while condemning change undertaken merely to profit from transitory popular tastes. He articulates this message through the ironic forum of a souvenir tee-shirt, which bears the following legend: "Do not replace family traditions with media imposed conventions." He emphasizes his message through numerous hand-lettered signs that he has posted all over the shop. One criticizes those native Cajuns who have rejected the "nice gumbo" of their own heritage in favor of "the cold, bland American hot dog." Another defines commercialism as the process by which

we take something good, whether it be music, beer or anything else and "fuck it up." Still another, prominent in the jam area, warns that no participant is to "perform." Performers, it admonishes, can go elsewhere—this jam is a communal endeavor in which the music is the focus, not the desire of any individual to stand out. Another sign urges parents to confine small children to the outer edge of the jam circle, a vantage point from which they can listen and learn but not dominate. Marc does not appear to dislike children and he and Ann have raised four of their own. He believes firmly, however, in the value of accumulated wisdom and he wants children to observe, learn from and respect their elders. [26]

Traditional heritage, in Savoy's opinion, consists of values and practices that have lasted for generations precisely because they are worthwhile. These values and practices, if honored, can ensure "a good life and all the wonders it has to offer." The mass media, interested in the continual renewal of profit, has no use for time-honored symbols of heritage. It demands change, he believes, so it can constantly sell new items. Thus, it repeatedly urges people to get rid of everything in their life that is old including, in Savoy's words, "your traditions and whatever else that makes you an individual." Savoy is particularly disturbed by the tendency of commercial interests to create products that appear to mimic valuable aspects of heritage. They do this, he maintains, in order to sell items that are superficially unique and thereby interesting, yet possessed of enough mainstream elements to engender wide appeal. The resulting "imitation," he argues, "is usually more popular than the thing being imitated." He blames this on a public that is not educated sufficiently to appreciate unique cultural subtleties, resulting in products that

exaggerate the most obvious cultural references, while minimizing or ignoring less overt aspects of heritage that contribute to beauty or value of genuine depth.[27]

Savoy is a realist who has no expectation that the mass media and other large commercial interests will develop any genuine appreciation of cultural nuance. He directs his ire toward undemanding consumers, willing to succumb to the media's more mainstream lures. He is most critical of those fellow Cajuns who, in his view, cooperate in the destruction of their own heritage. "Who do you think will be a role model for an up and coming young Cajun musician," he asks, "the old man playing a beautiful, intricate, hard to learn style of music that goes unnoticed and unappreciated or the other appearing on TV, under the spotlight, jumping around, hollering, making mainstream sounds on his accordion and getting well paid for it?" He is convinced that far too many young Cajuns are willing to exploit the superficial trappings of their culture in order to succeed. Thus, inspired perhaps by the example of his wife, he concludes that the survival of Cajun traditions will likely depend on the interests of outsiders—on folk revivalists perhaps—who yearn so strongly for traditions of any kind that they strive to locate and identify with the deep-seated elements of another's culture.[28]

Marc performs with Ann in two bands, each of which has recorded for Arhoolie. The Savoy-Doucet Cajun Band is a collaboration with Michael Doucet. The Savoy Family Band consists of the couple and their talented children. Marc's personal musical aesthetic, like that of many who consciously fly the flag of tradition, is conservative in style. The sound of his albums hearkens back to that of Joe Falcon's seminal Cajun records of the 1920s. In concert, the bandmembers avoid the "performance" that Marc disdains. They wear no particular stage clothes and generally play while seated. The

music dominates, not the appearance or personality of the music maker. This approach is consistent with Arhoolie's overall style, which—with the noticeable exception of Clifton Chenier—leans toward a more archaic sound, one with a relatively limited commercial potential. Arhoolie shares this conservative approach with Smithsonian-Folkways, the successor to Moe Asch's legendary label, which also mines the Louisiana sound. These revival labels stand in stark contrast to Swallow, Gin, and Maison de Soul Records, the trio of labels owned by Floyd Soileau's Flat Town Productions. Based in the prairie town of Ville Platte north of Lafayette, Flat Town has since the 1950s released more Louisiana music—from all points on the traditional to modern spectrum—than any other company. Soileau's output ranges from the co-called "swamp pop" of the fifties and sixties—which brought him national success with Rod Bernard's "This Should Go On Forever"—to the Balfa Brothers' legendary "yellow album," to Rockin' Sidney Simien's "Don't Mess With My Toot-Toot," a zydeco-infused novelty number that won a Grammy and was an international hit in 1985. With an ear undoubtedly attuned to the listening habits of his Louisiana neighbors, Soileau is either a prime example of a businessman willing to sell out his heritage for profit or an astute, respectful connoisseur of the malleable but durable nature of his region's vernacular culture.[29]

Rounder has adhered more closely to Soileau's approach than to that of the folk boom labels that served as its models. Its Louisiana albums have ranged from the reissue of the Lomax field recordings of the 1930s—released previously on Swallow—to the modern funk and hip-hop infused zydeco of Beau Jocque, a sound that took dancehalls from Houston to New Orleans by storm in the 1990s. Despite Marc Savoy's complaint that commercial products lack nuance, it is arguable that the wide-ranging offerings of

Rounder and Soileau, taken as a whole, comprise a more accurate and thus more nuanced picture of indigenous Louisiana music than one confined to older, supposedly traditional forms. By at least one measure, Rounder has surpassed Flat Town as the most influential purveyor of the southwest Louisiana sound. While Soileau has had the very occasional national hit, which he has always licensed to larger companies to attain broad distribution, he has concentrated his business within his home state, selling local music to local fans. Rounder has reached for an audience outside Louisiana, a stance that benefits working musicians who, however devoted they may be to their ancestral music, want to be heard and, in many cases, find a national audience, get gigs, and earn a living.

Rounder's Cajun music debut came in 1974, when it released an LP by the Louisiana Aces. The project came through Dick Spottswood whose record reviews in Bluegrass Unlimited had provided Rounder with early publicity. In 1973 Spottswood heard the Aces on the radio during a visit to Louisiana. The band had formed in 1950. D.L. Menard, then a 20-year-old devotee of Hank Williams, joined them two years later. Menard, who became the Aces lead singer, guitarist and primary songwriter, embodied the natural hybridity of modern Cajun music. So far as he was concerned, the mixture of French music and commercial country sounds that was popular in the fifties was simply part of the natural order of things. "In those days," he told Ann Savoy, "it was mixed, not just Cajun. Country music was pretty popular and a Cajun band that couldn't play country music with the Cajun music didn't have too many jobs."[30]

Emulating Williams, Menard and the Aces set French lyrics to honky-tonk rhythms, augmenting Menard's guitar and voice with steel guitar, accordion, fiddle and drums. The band released a number of singles to regional acclaim in the fifties and

sixties. Menard modeled "La Porte D'en Arriere" ("The Back Door") on the tune of Williams' acclaimed "Honky Tonk Blues." This lively two-step is a morality tale that tells of a drinker who routinely sneaks home through the back door, hoping to hide his misdeeds. Eventually, having ignored entreaties to change his ways, he loses his money and friends and, after turning to crime, is escorted to jail—through the back door. It became so popular throughout Acadiana that many Louisianans declared it the new Cajun "national anthem," replacing the venerable "Jole Blon," though virtually no one in other parts of the country heard it. It transformed Menard into a regional legend. [31]

In 1973 the Aces were no longer active. Menard was performing only occasionally and supporting himself by manufacturing handcrafted wooden chairs. Spottswood was then on the Board of the National Folk Festival. He tracked the songwriter down and offered a festival gig if Menard would reform the band. At the festival, Spottswood introduced the re-united Aces to the Rounders. The label owners were not, at the time, particularly knowledgeable about Cajun music. Its roots were geographically distant from the owners' more familiar southern destinations in Virginia and North Carolina. Moreover, at a time when the labelmates never dreamed of traveling by air or staying in hotels, Cajun country was a three day drive from Boston and lacked a circle of acquaintances who could offer a floor on which to sleep. Despite being ill-equipped to discern precisely where the Aces lay along the traditional to contemporary continuum, the Rounders were nonetheless eager to record them. They knew that Arhoolie had already explored the region musically. They trusted Spottswood. They also enjoyed their meeting with the band. Irwin describes them as "shirt off their backs" types. Leighton found Menard, in particular, to be extraordinarily down-to-earth. She

considered him admirably unimpressed by both his own talent and his local success. He seemed, to her, to view music as simply one component of a life broadly blessed; a man as likely to talk about chair making as about songwriting. In this context the question of strict traditionality—never a huge Rounder concern to begin with—was irrelevant. The Rounders concluded intuitively that this non-mainstream, community-based music was right for their label.[32]

The Aces recorded the album in Menard's home under technical conditions that Spottswood considered abysmal. The band chose the repertoire, which consisted predominantly of songs they had released previously on singles sold only in Louisiana. Unable to understand French, Spottswood asked Menard not to sing anything dirty. He also cautioned that no one would get rich from the project. No one seemed to expect riches. The bandmembers were pleased by the chance to re-record some of their old tunes in stereo. They were also proud of the fact that "this time we get to do the music not just for Floyd [Soileau] up there in the next town, but this record goes up to Boston and from there potentially all over the world." That, Spottswood adds, "is essentially what happened." Alone among the Aces, Menard eagerly embraced the opportunity to work as a musician again, even if only part time. From the standpoint of the Rounders—who had few financial expectations—sales were sufficient to allow a continued partnership, particularly given their fondness for the singer. Ultimately "the Cajun Hank Williams," as Menard was known, released three more Rounder albums under his own name and became a folk festival favorite, touring internationally.[33]

Ten years after his Rounder debut, Menard wanted to make a straightforward country album in the manner of his honky-tonk heroes. Like Clifton Chenier, who

yearned to record popular rhythm and blues, he sought an artistic and commercial autonomy that challenged parochial assumptions about the nature of "true" Louisiana French music. The Rounders acquiesced. Menard recorded Cajun Saturday Night in Nashville with a band of luminaries that Rounder assembled from the worlds of bluegrass and country music, including master Dobroist Jerry Douglas, who produced the album, and Ricky Skaggs, then a star. In addition to several of Menard's own songs, it included five by Hank Williams and one by Ernest Tubb. Sung in Menard's accented English and lacking the ubiquitous accordion, the album represents Cajun music only in the sense that it was made by a Cajun and reflects his personal musical roots—roots grounded in Acadiana and intertwined thoroughly with the commercial country sounds that once captivated that region. It fell to Menard's accompanists to urge the inclusion of a couple of songs sung in French. This might suggest that Marc Savoy was correct in asserting that non-Cajuns are the most interested in the preservation of Louisiana's vernacular culture. That, however, is not necessarily fair to Menard. He had recorded a great many traditional tunes and had a thorough knowledge of the old repertoire. He simply did not want to be tied down.[34]

Rounder recognized the unique nature of this release. While Menard's other albums and Cajun releases in general received catalog numbers within the company's 6000 series, reserved for ethnic musics within America, Cajun Saturday Night received catalog number 0198, within the numerical range reserved for original recordings of American country music. Commenting on the tension between preservation and the recognition of hybridity and cultural growth, Leighton says that though Rounder has always been interested in the preservation of culturally specific expression, it has never

wanted to suggest to any artist that "your oppression is good for you."[35] While "oppression" is too strong a term as applied to Menard in the 1980s, Leighton's point is that Rounder has sought to provide a forum balancing perceived cultural essentialism and the desire to preserve heritage with the artistic desire to explore, create and sell records. Bringing these varied factors together, Cajun Saturday Night may stand as one of the most authentic and democratic examples of recent Cajun culture. Without claiming an imagined purity, the album represents one realistic slice of the Cajun cultural experience and, despite little prospect for financial reward, provides a talented yet relatively unknown community musician and working man with a star-studded showcase for his diverse artistic impulses.

D.L. Menard and Marc Savoy are part-time musicians with income sources that free them from inordinate concerns about the sale of records or concert tickets. There are many musicians, however, who hope to sustain themselves through art while retaining their identities as culturally specific performers. These artists revere their culture and desire to promote it but recognize that their ability to do so while surviving economically requires careful strategizing. In the world of Cajun music, Michael Doucet's BeauSoleil has been the most successful at managing the tension between preservation and innovation. In the years after Coteau disbanded, BeauSoleil recorded a series of acoustic albums for Arhoolie and Swallow. However, bandleader Doucet could not earn a living from music. He taught school and worked in film and radio production. Around the start of the 1980s New Orleans chef Paul Prudhomme helped foster a Cajun cooking frenzy, which encouraged an interest in other aspects of Cajun heritage. Relatively suddenly, BeauSoleil was able to find more work. Initially this work was primarily within

Louisiana, but interest outside the state expanded and BeauSoleil tried to make the most of its opportunities. In 1984 the band made a featured appearance on Prairie Home Companion, the successful public radio series. In 1985 Irwin asked Doucet if BeauSoleil was willing to record a "progressive" album in the spirit of Coteau. Given his numerous traditional records, Doucet felt ready to return to an electric sound. He also wanted to perform more and hoped he could find an audience that appreciated varied aspects of the Cajun music spectrum. Other commitments delayed the project. In 1986 BeauSoleil's music was featured in the film Belizaire the Cajun and its accompanying soundtrack album. That year, the band began performing full time.[36]

In 1987 Rounder released BeauSoleil's Bayou Boogie, a progressive tour de force in the spirit of Coteau. The album features traditional Cajun tunes and a handful of originals performed by a lineup that augments the fiddle and accordion with electric guitar and bass, electric slide guitar, piano and synthesizers. The band was touring actively when, that same year, the film The Big Easy momentarily brought Louisiana back to the pop culture forefront. For the second year in a row BeauSoleil's music was part of a Hollywood film. In addition to being the only full-time Cajun touring band, BeauSoleil had an extensive body of recorded material and the proven ability to perform in both traditional and progressive styles. Promoters seeking a Cajun band saw BeauSoleil as the act of choice. Through a steady stream of albums and continuous touring, the band has held onto that distinction. It remains the one Cajun band most likely to come to mind among those who have not delved deeply into Louisiana's varied musical offerings. Other professional Cajun musicians have had to find their own route to the simultaneous goals of commercial viability and cultural fidelity.

Bruce Daigrepont, one of Louisiana's more locally visible Cajun musicians, has chosen a path different from that of BeauSoleil. Daigrepont, born in 1958 in New Orleans, began playing the guitar at age five, though he did not pick up the accordion—now his primary instrument—until he was 20. He is the predominant exponent of Cajun music in the New Orleans area, a region geographically removed from the heart of Cajun country and musically dominated by funk, rock, jazz and R&B. As he began playing Cajun music publicly in the late 1970s, Daigrepont, an ethnic Cajun, was caught up in the same cultural renaissance that captivated Doucet. Suddenly, he recalls, everyone within his musical circle seemed to be speaking French. Raised by bilingual parents, he grew up a master of what he calls "crooked French," but as a young man he consciously perfected his skills and for a time would speak only French at home. In college he prepared for a career as an accountant but he has never earned his living as anything other than a musician. Married with two children, he understands that he needs ongoing audience appeal in order to support his family and he continually assesses how to sustain that appeal. Still, he sees himself in culturally specific terms, recognizes his unique musical strengths and professes no desire to become known as anything other than a skilled and artful cultural exemplar. "I love the culture," he says. "I love the people, I love the language. It's all tied in together. And of course, I know I'll never have a hit record. Success to me is if I can continue to make a living at what I'm doing and have a decent life with my family, and continue to play the music of my culture. That's success. I'll never get any big notoriety and that's not really important to me. Important thing to me is if I can support my family."[37]

Daigrepont has never toured heavily. Uncomfortable spending long stretches of time away from his family, he earns the bulk of his living playing in Louisiana. Since June 1986 he has held down a regular Sunday-night gig at Tipitina's, a famed New Orleans club. He makes excursions to European festivals and French speaking regions of Canada. Most of the time, he is home. Nonetheless, he understands that as a working musician he needs to record periodically—to satisfy the artistic demands he places upon himself, to appear current to promoters, and to have a souvenir he can sell to fans at his shows, in the hope that they will remember him and spread his name. In 1986 he began searching for a label willing to release his self-made debut album. With little music business knowledge, he sent an unsolicited tape to several companies, including Arhoolie and local powerhouse Swallow. He recalls Arhoolie's Strachwitz telling him, "'Well, I'll put it out for you, but the record business is really tough these days. You can't really make money.' It was like he said he'd do it," says Daigrepont, "but the whole thing was kind of negative." Floyd Soileau was more eager. With Daigrepont's tape playing in the background, he called and offered a contract. The flattered musician knew and liked the Ville Platte record man but he yearned for something more than a purely local release. He wanted a company comfortable with the regional nature of his music but capable of providing an audience beyond southern Louisiana. A representative of Los Angeles-based Rhino Records was kind enough to speak with him at some length. The record was not right for Rhino, he explained, but he suggested that Daigrepont try Rounder. Daigrepont sent his tape off to Cambridge and waited. He was playing at Tipitina's one Sunday night when Leighton, with whom he had never spoken, introduced herself and told him, "we love your record and want to release it." It began a long professional

relationship that ultimately led to four Daigrepont albums on Rounder between 1987 and 1999.[38]

"I like to say I play Louisiana French music," Daigrepont says. "In my opinion I don't step outside [that boundary]." French, he maintains, is primary among this music's relatively few essentials. "You've got to keep the French language in the music," he says. It would embarrass Daigrepont if he were unable to understand a song request or a fan's effort at conversation presented in French. He is pleased that his long time fiddle player, a native of Alabama, has made some effort to learn the language, a commitment that he considers a necessary sign of respect for the audience and the repertoire. Assuming that French presence, Daigrepont argues that "as long as . . . the primary instruments in that music are the accordion and the fiddle . . . then I think you're staying within the boundaries." While he electrifies his band and plays with a drummer, he avoids the more overt experimentation of Coteau and BeauSoleil's Bayou Boogie. He deems electric guitars and keyboards "outside instruments." At Tipitina's on Sunday nights his band consists only of accordion, fiddle and the "standard rhythm section" of electric bass and drums. He is proud that on his 1999 album Paradis he supplements the accordion, fiddle and rhythm section with nothing more than the decidedly traditional and acoustic triangle and washboard.[39]

Daigrepont understands that he needs to strategize and sometimes compromise in order to draw a paying audience year after year within a relatively small geographic area. Conceding that the boundaries of Cajun music are elusive, he adopts a regional as well as an ethnic identification, an approach very much in keeping with the attitude that prevailed in Louisiana in the 1950s. His shows dip regularly into zydeco, swamp pop and country

music. He pays attention to pacing. "I always find it monotonous to play one two-step, one waltz. When I'm playing a dance I don't want nobody to predict what I'll do next." Though he foregrounds the French language, he will sing in English. He performs Hank Williams' crowd pleasing "Jambalaya" and his own "I'm Bettin'," a honky-tonker driven by a vocal that would be more at home on the traditional side of Nashville, as opposed to Lafayette. Albums present a special problem. Though many fans enjoy the social nature of dancing to Cajun tunes, they do not necessarily require a wide range of Cajun recordings for their personal listening at home. For the majority, the inability to speak French prevents them from identifying with—or even distinguishing among—song lyrics. Moreover, the musician's need to appeal to the genre's hardcore dance fans by keeping the style identifiable leads to the common lament that much Cajun music sounds alike. It is a problem shared by old-time fiddling, polka, Tejano music, and other predominantly social folk forms developed largely for dancing and devoid of the "hooks" designed to catch the ear of pop music listeners.[40]

Given these circumstances, the existence of even a few professional Cajun musicians can quickly overwhelm the limited market for retail sales. Daigrepont's own album sales are miniscule. He estimates that his four albums have collectively sold about 25,000 copies. Nonetheless, he wants his records to appeal to fans and he cares deeply about the artistry he preserves on disc. He consequently strives for diversity within and among his albums, while struggling simultaneously to retain his vernacular identity. He does this in part by tricks as simple as varying his rhythms, an approach that any commercial musician in any genre is likely to employ. He will play a bouncy waltz or a slow and bluesy waltz or a polka-like waltz. He placed five waltzes among Paradis's

thirteen cuts and he gave each a distinct sound. That same album contains a driving rendition of "Ay Tete Fee," the rocker with which Clifton Chenier made his initial splash in the late fifties (and which Chenier titled "Eh, Petite Fille"). More significantly Daigrepont will sometimes compromise those very factors that in his view constitute the "boundaries" of his chosen music. His albums include a fair number of English language songs. Notwithstanding his implicit disparagement of "outside instruments," he uses them on record to flesh out his sound. On Stir Up The Roux, for example, the debut album that caught Leighton's ear, he includes both piano and electric steel guitar.[41]

In thinking consciously about his music's marketability and the nature of his public performance, Daigrepont veers toward the so-called dangers that disturb staunch traditionalists such as Marc Savoy. As a working musician, however, Daigrepont helps keep alive the Cajun community's varied musical traditions. No one hearing his records or seeing him perform could identify him as anything other than a product of the Louisiana French heritage that he reveres. With a cultural commitment that forms an explicit part of his stage show, an overwhelming emphasis on the French language, a sound dominated by accordion and fiddle, and albums that augment the bandleader's original compositions with those by undisputed masters of Louisiana French music, it is difficult to believe that anyone could consider Daigrepont a dangerous diluter of heritage.

Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys tread closer to that elusive cultural boundary. Their 2001 Rounder release Happytown draws thematic inspiration from Creole folk poetry. Musically, however, it contains, in the words of one critic, "distorted electric guitar, unusual rhythm patterns and even [electronically] processed vocals." Along with sound samples from old field recordings, programmed drum loops and

"Beatlesque harmonies," the album adds up to "pretty revolutionary stuff," designed consciously to appeal "to a more indie rock audience."[42] It is an approach that musicians could take only in the contemporary recording studio, not out on the prairie and it has helped The Playboys, who have released nine albums between 1990 and 2004, become Rounder's biggest selling Cajun act. Yet the band was not always the revolutionary force that Happytown suggests. Born in 1969 Riley grew up around Mamou in the heart of Cajun country and first heard traditional Cajun music at family gatherings. He discovered the Balfa Brothers' venerated "yellow album" as a boy and promptly began accompanying it with a cheap accordion. When he was 13 his parents presented him with an "Acadian" brand accordion, handmade by Marc Savoy, a second-cousin who sometimes played music at Riley family gatherings. Within two years Riley met Dewey Balfa, who took to the talented and enthusiastic young musician, teaching him fiddle and encouraging his accordion work. By 16, Riley had earned a slot in Balfa's band and a couple of years later, recognized locally as a Balfa protégé, he stepped out. With friend and fellow Balfa acolyte David Greeley he formed his own band. Casting about for a name, they approached guitarist Kevin Barzas' father, who had been a member of the locally venerated but defunct Mamou Playboys. Barzas explains, "Steve asked my father if we could use the name, the Mamou Playboys. My dad felt we were carrying on the same tradition, so he said go ahead." Riley adds that the elder Barzas first satisfied himself that the young musicians intended to "play the music right. He gave me a big talk and everything. Now I'm sure in his eyes we're not doing what he wanted me to do."[43]

The Playboys' first album contained nothing that would disappoint musical or cultural conservatives. Released by Rounder in 1990, sung in French and performed on

acoustic instruments, it had a traditional sound. In 1991, the band, still performing almost exclusively in Louisiana, ventured to the annual South by Southwest Music Conference in Austin, Texas, a combination mass business meeting, industry networking opportunity and artist showcase. By now, BeauSoleil was fairly well known as a Cajun innovator. The Playboys took the opposite approach. With Riley performing while seated, fronting an all-acoustic lineup, enthusiastic audiences admired them as "new traditionalists," exciting precisely because they were—with the exception of the over 30 Greeley—young performers working within an older idiom. Their second album, 1992's 'Tit Galoup Pour Mamou, was in the same vein but after that, prompted by a shift in personnel and a desire to work more on the road, their approach began to change.

New drummer Kevin Dugas was a veteran of Louisiana dancehalls and had worked for Belton Richard, a smooth-voiced crooner and regional superstar who, at his peak in the sixties and seventies, blended his Cajun accordion and traditional expertise with middle-of-the-road pop and country inflections. As Riley put it, "Kevin can do anything we want to do, you know, he can lay down any kind of groove, any kind of rhythm we want to do. And that's what's nice. It's the freedom to play whatever you want to play."[44] Dugas insisted that the band hire a full-time electric bassist, a role soon filled by Peter Schwarz, who doubled on fiddle in the studio. A non-Cajun, Schwarz is the son of New Lost City Rambler Tracy Schwarz. Both father and son had befriended Dewey Balfa years earlier and Peter had studied formally with the renowned Cajun fiddler, aided by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. He met Riley while both were still in their teens. After graduating from Harvard, Schwarz relocated to the Lafayette area where he spent approximately seven years performing with and managing the Playboys.

With the addition of Dugas and Schwarz, the once decidedly old-school Playboys had both a "more modern Lafayette dancehall back beat" and "a walking bass." The band had moved beyond the style of Marc Savoy to that of Bruce Daigrepont, on the path to an even more progressive sound.[45]

Before the Playboys could become renowned Cajun innovators they had to overcome culturally based insecurity stemming from the fact that neither Riley nor Greeley spoke French. Greeley embarked on a conscious effort to study his heritage and transformed himself into a fairly knowledgeable Cajun historian and an adept French conversationalist. Riley, who sang phonetically on the group's earliest albums, learned French by learning songs. He has since augmented this through formal study but he based his initial vocabulary upon lyrical phrases that provided him with the ability to improvise vocally, calling upon a studied repertoire of stage patter and traditional motifs. While Schwarz maintains that Riley is now able to understand a fair amount of spoken French, he concedes that the bandleader's grammatical ability is weak, a source of ongoing discomfort. Riley also had difficulty adapting to the role of professional entertainer, which kept him glued to his chair during the band's earliest gigs. Unlike Daigrepont, who honed his craft around New Orleans, a center of music business professionalism, Riley's musicianship developed in the context of rural family jams. In a figurative sense, he apprenticed under the dictate of Marc Savoy's foreboding sign, the one that warns "performers" to go elsewhere. With this admonition in mind, he could not see himself as—again recalling Savoy—a common entertainer, "under the spotlight, jumping around, hollering." Ken Irwin was among those who urged a change. He understood that such reticence would not work in clubs outside Louisiana. If Riley wanted to spread his high-

energy dance music to younger people nationwide, he needed a vigorous image—one memorable enough to keep the audience anticipating a return engagement. Schwarz laughingly recalls that the bandleader's initial response was to replace his chair with a stool before he finally, hesitantly, began to stand for his audience.[46]

Today, Riley stands and entertains with apparent relish. Still, the band is a sometimes delicate balancing act, as members juggle the competing demands of remaining faithful to heritage, fostering a popularity that will allow them to continue touring and satisfying the artistic desire to create new and diverse music. It is a struggle that, Schwarz says, band members thought about "constantly" during his lengthy tenure during the 1990s. Sometimes these tensions bubbled to the surface. Schwarz recalls one "knock down, drag out" battle with folklorist and noted Cajun authority Barry Ancelet after a performance at Lafayette's Festival Acadiennes, an annual celebration of Cajun music and culture. The band infuriated Ancelet by performing one of Chenier's zydeco staples in English, the very language in which Chenier had performed the song. They, in turn, took offense at the folklorist's desire to constrain them. Looking backward, Schwarz believes that Riley would have dismissed the incident quickly if French had been his first language. Insecurity about his linguistic abilities led to defensiveness about the scope of his cultural imperatives. Conversely, Irwin was distressed when the band named its 1996 release La Toussaint to commemorate All-Saints Day, when Cajun families gather in cemeteries to honor their dead. He thought the record could be a commercial breakthrough but was concerned that the difficult-to-pronounce French title would hurt it in the marketplace. The Playboys refused to make a change, though their prior album had an English title. Had La Toussaint affirmed Cajun heritage with explicitly vernacular

sounds, perhaps they would have agreed. Musically, however, it was an experimental work. Thus, the band wanted their chosen title as an explicit nod to their French heritage.[47]

Audiences impose demands as well. At times the Playboys want fans to see them as "a great band, not just a great Cajun band." At other times they recognize that their Cajun identity is the "golden egg," the attribute that makes them distinctive and taps into a relatively small but fiercely loyal circuit of international admirers. While many audience members have wide-open minds, some confront the band with narrow notions of authenticity. People have approached the bandstand after a swamp pop number or a country tune commenting, "Very enjoyable, but could you please play something a little more authentic?" "Are you saying," the musicians respond, that the legendary Cajun crooner Belton Richard "is not authentic?" To far too many of these skeptics, Schwarz explains, "authentic" means "playing like a specific record they owned." To them, that record, that single document of a particular performance at a particular time and place, represents the entirety of Cajun vernacular music. It is an understanding that lacks any "sense of the dynamics you have when you live in Louisiana, where music isn't a product, it's a process. It changes every day because you don't write it down and you don't do it exactly" the same way, over and over again. So, Schwarz continues, "we always reacted to that very defensively—'Oh, they don't know what they're talking about' . . . In a lot of ways it made us unnaturally resolved towards expanding the music, just out of rebellion."[48]

Rebellion aside, the Playboys' status as a professional touring ensemble is a pragmatic factor in the drive to expand musically. Wanting to send their crowds "over the

edge," the band seeks "killer songs," which Riley thinks of as "weapons." He regularly determines that "we need a new weapon," which compels a fairly steady search for new tunes and inventive arrangements. It is a situation, Schwarz explains, that encourages musical "evolution" at a speed far faster than that which prevails among more informal players back home in Louisiana. There, a local band might perform once or twice, a week. When on the road, the Playboys perform every night, often for weeks at a time. Coupled with the release of nine albums in less than 15 years, it is a routine that demands a steady need for new "weapons." When the Playboys enter the recording studio they find themselves thinking, "We're going to blow the doors off this place with all these new ideas that we have for this traditional idiom." These new ideas encompass the range of options presented by contemporary recording techniques. The Playboys do not simply perform live on the Mamou prairies. They are a recording band that tours internationally and they enjoy experimenting with the electronically processed vocals and distorted guitar sounds available to any other band in any other genre. The use of such techniques, they believe, demonstrates that Cajun music can be as contemporary as any other art form. This does not mean that anything goes. As Schwarz puts it, "There's still some sense of there being rules." They have not, to date, released an exclusively English language album nor does Schwarz believe they would translate a traditional French tune into English, which seems sacrilegious.[49]

Despite the Playboys' demonstrated willingness to experiment, anxiety over these "rules" helped sabotage a potential commercial breakthrough on one occasion. The band's 1998 album Bayou Ruler contained a contemporary French-language song entitled "Laisse-Moi Connaitre," a mid-tempo rocker written by Greeley and producer C.C.

Adcock. Brad Paul, Rounder's long-time radio promotion supervisor, played the tune for a broadcast consultant before the album's release. The two concluded that, with some changes, the song had a chance of doing well on the national Americana chart, which tracks the progress of rootsy rock and country played on niche radio stations inclined toward Rounder's music. Rounder had no history of interfering with the band's albums. This time Paul asked if they would re-record the tune with the hope of attaining an Americana "hit." He wanted them to replace the French vocal with an English translation while de-emphasizing the accordion and fiddle in favor of the electric guitar. Rounder offered to bear all additional studio fees, foregoing the usual practice of charging such costs against a band's royalties. It also agreed to issue the re-recorded tune as a single and to hire an independent promoter to foster radio play. Paul presented this as the band's option and it prompted considerable discussion within the Playboys. Greeley reacted with visceral anger at the idea of tampering with his song for purely commercial purposes. Riley wavered and non-Cajun Schwarz lobbied for the change, arguing that this was a chance to promote all of the band's work. In the end the band agreed and the album contained both versions of the song. The experiment, however, failed. The use of a different studio and the absence of a previously borrowed piece of equipment made it difficult for the guitarist to capture the tone that had caught the consultant's ear. Riley sang half-heartedly and the Playboys proved unwilling to submerge the accordion to the degree that Paul suggested. Rounder kept its part of the bargain but the hoped for breakthrough did not happen. Paul reported that, despite the English translation, disc jockeys found the song "too French." [50]

In September 2000 I stood in Lafayette's Girard Park and watched as over ten thousand people cheered the Playboys' performance from the stage of the Festival Acadiennes, a free celebration of heritage that attracts large numbers of local residents. In that moment of exaltation, the band appeared as heroes, honored for their music and their role as emissaries to the world beyond Cajun country. It was not a particularly conservative performance. Tunes reverberated with electric guitar and those three part vocal harmonies that critics had termed "Beatlesque." Amidst the delighted crowd, I spotted a nearby middle-aged man who seemed to disapprove and I asked him if he liked the band. "They sound like Jefferson Airplane," he grumbled. It was not a compliment. Yet the performance as a whole was, to use Schwarz's term, within the "traditional idiom," with the emphasis upon the second word of that phrase. Combining language, primary instrumentation, lyric themes, and the inclusion of selected well-loved, older songs it was, in overall effect, an unmistakable expression of Cajun culture. It enthusiastically celebrated hundreds of years of heritage, even as it brought new flourishes to well-worn and thoroughly recognizable Cajun elements. If the cheers of this partisan crowd were an indication, no one mistook this for a performance of anything other than Louisiana French music.

In considering this particular blend of old and new in the context of mass culture, I find sociologist Edwin Hollander's concept of "idiosyncrasy credits" to be particularly useful. Hollander defines such credits as "positive impressions . . . held by others," which accumulate "as a result of perceived conformity and competence." Once earned, these credits afford their owner considerable leeway with respect to permissible "nonconformity, innovation, and the assertion of influence."[51] Succinctly, the Playboys'

innovations, like those of BeauSoleil, are authentically Cajun because fellow Cajuns—respecting the band's cultural knowledge and competence—allow such innovation. Riley may not speak French well but he and co-leader Greeley are ethnic Cajuns. Riley grew up in Cajun country and learned the music of his people in a traditional manner. Greeley embraced his heritage in adulthood, studying both its history and language. Each apprenticed with the legendary Balfa. Each has an encyclopedic mastery of Louisiana music. "They are," Schwarz says, "true scholars of Louisiana music—of the best Louisiana music, the music that has made the most impact on the culture. So there's a purity to the process there, an authenticity to the process . . ." As their more traditional recordings demonstrate, each can play an old tune with all the nuance and beauty of the masters. This distinguishes them, Schwarz continues, from every random rock band that augments their set with "Jambalaya" or an occasional accordion riff and claims that it can "play Cajun."[52] For all of these reasons Cajuns appear to embrace the band's work as part of the Louisiana vernacular. Only time will tell if the Playboys will take the next step and enter tradition by forging a secure connection with its past, exemplifying its time and becoming cultural source material for future generations.

In recent decades the accelerated hunt for new ideas evident within commercial Cajun music has swept Louisiana's zydeco scene with even greater force. Rounder's forays into the world of French Black Creole music have followed the company's typical approach of releasing both the contemporary and the more strictly traditional without discrimination. In 1979 the label embraced a scholarly, documentary approach with Zodico: Louisiana Creole Music, a collection of informal recordings made and annotated by folklorist Nick Spitzer. Spitzer undertook the project as part of his academic research

and brought it to Rounder after he completed recording. In lengthy liner notes typical of the label in its earliest days Spitzer describes the links between French-speaking blacks and whites in Louisiana with respect to various cultural markers. The music, recorded at homes and in local clubs, surveys the black vernacular through the generations. The album begins with the accordion/fiddle combination of brothers Erastes and Joseph "Bebe" Carriere, born in 1900 and 1908. As a young man Bebe had accompanied seminal Creole accordionist Amedee Ardoin and Spitzer captures the brothers playing an old-style, wordless, one-step dance number plus a version of the Cajun classic "Evangeline Waltz," to which Bebe adds a bluesy vocal. Next, to the accompaniment of nothing more than a ringing triangle, accordionist Fremont Fontenot plays a contredanse—a form, Spitzer speculates, that both Cajuns and Creoles adopted from North Louisiana Anglos. Inez Catalon sings several a cappella ballads in French, all of which she learned traditionally. Side one ends with what was then a relatively modern rhythmic two-step in the style of Chenier. Lawrence Ardoin, a descendant of Amedee, carries the melody on accordion, accompanied by violin and triangle plus electric guitar, bass and drums.

Side 2 takes a stylistic leap forward with a rendition of "Lucille" by Mike and the Soul Accordion Band. A tale of a woman spurning a suitor's entreaties, the song is a musical variant of the identically named and similarly themed Little Richard hit from 1957. In his comments on 20-year-old accordionist Mike Onezine and his ensemble, Spitzer provides a concise description of zydeco's development from Amedee Ardoin, through the days of Chavis and Chenier, to the present:

> In many ways, this band represents what is happening to zodico music in the urban setting. Its relation to Cajun is becoming more remote both instrumentally and stylistically. Also, it is increasingly

> syncretic with soul music and, thus, the Caribbean rhythmic inheritance often found is becoming less pronounced. Where the previous generations diverged from the traditional French sound first into country blues and later into rhythm and blues, today's groups favor soul music. Still, it is identifiably French soul music, or 'cordion music' as it is called in Lafayette. Mike adds, 'I like French and soul mixed up so we play in between the two. I believe that's what the people like.'[53]

From this somewhat scholarly beginning Rounder went on to capture the continued commercial development of contemporary zydeco, generally with producer Scott Billington overseeing the recordings. Billington considers himself a fan of traditional music but he has never seen himself as a purist and he has no interest in the "slavish replication" of older forms. He tends to discuss traditional music as a collection of stylistic genres, not as a reflection of the lived experience of a people. It is not that he discounts such experience. It is simply not directly relevant to his role as a record producer. Speaking about cajun music, zydeco and the blues in 1999, almost 20 years after he began producing, Billington says, "I feel that the genres themselves in terms of being able to grab attention in the media are kind of tired. We can't make the same record now that we would have made 20 years ago. I mean, maybe some music is timeless but people just don't want to hear the same thing forever. I feel that today," he explains, "more than ever the success of an artist is as much personality based as musically based." "What really gets me going," he adds, is to find someone "turning the whole tradition upside down . . . somebody coming out of a tradition and just lighting a fire under the whole thing." "What gets me excited the most is when you hear something coming out of a tradition like zydeco or New Orleans rhythm and blues and somebody just finds

something very brash and something relevant to a contemporary audience to say in that genre."[54]

As a young producer working in Louisiana in the early 1980s, Billington was already looking for personalities willing to transform old musical traditions. He first experienced zydeco around 1980 through an appearance by Buckwheat Zydeco and His Ils Sont Partis Band at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Buckwheat is the professional name of Stanley Dural, Jr. Dural, born in Lafayette in 1947, first heard French music played within his bilingual family. His father was an accomplished accordionist who was familiar with many old Creole standards. The younger Dural, who began playing piano and organ as a child, claims that he hated the old music his father enjoyed. He loved, instead, Fats Domino and the Rolling Stones. As a teenager he performed in locally successful R & B and soul bands. In 1976 Chenier, who knew Dural's father, offered the young man the keyboard position in his road band. Dural initially saw the job as simply a good professional opportunity, but his stint with Chenier was transformative as he witnessed the zydeco king's eclectic, rocking approach and the crowds' enthusiastic response. He left after two years, determined to teach himself accordion and front his own large zydeco band.[55]

At the time Billington saw Dural's performance he knew little about zydeco, which he considered "an odd type of French blues." The show, which Buckwheat Zydeco presented with all the excitement of Chenier in his prime, thrilled the producer who thought, "yeah, this is something that the world should hear." This "was not old Creole folk music. [Dural] was a real aggressive young guy who put kind of a zydeco show band together, but it got people going."[56] Traditionalists such as Marc Savoy might see in this

commercially-oriented producer all that is wrong with the mass media's consumption of traditional artistry. Billington, however, found a willing partner in Dural, an indigenous Creole Rolling Stones fan eager to make exciting contemporary records. With the two Rounder albums they made together, Billington helped broaden the artist's repertoire and introduced elements of reggae to his sound. Dural moved on the larger Island Records, the label that helped transform Bob Marley into a superstar and reggae into a recognized genre within the pop music firmament. Though zydeco never found the same degree of success, Dural has become its most successful artist to date. He has taken Chenier's approach and applied it to the popular tunes of a new generation, bringing his accordion to bear on songs made famous previously by the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton and Bob Dylan, and working on record with eclectic country artist Willie Nelson and members of Los Lobos, the popular Los Angeles rock band with its own traditional roots in indigenous Mexican music.

After Buckwheat Zydeco, Billington worked with a broad range of black Louisiana accordionists. He works all ends of the stylistic spectrum, trying to bring out the artist's strengths as best he can. On the more traditional end stands Geno Delafose, whose father recorded for both Arhoolie and Rounder and whose music hearkens back, in Billington's words, to "the time before zydeco and Cajun became separate musical entities . . ." Delafose, who sings mostly in French, positions himself succinctly. "I do the old time Cajun music, Creole music and some zydeco. And the reason I do that is there is a lot of demand out there. And there are a lot of guys out there that they just jump on the bandwagon and start playing whatever is popular at the time. They don't go back as far as I do. I really like the old music and I would love to go hear it. But many times the only

way I can hear it is if I play it."[57] The demand "out there" to which Delafose refers is largely among whites, many outside southwest Louisiana, who are attracted to discernibly older styles. Herman Fuselier, a black journalist who writes frequently about Cajun music and zydeco, counts himself as a Delafose fan but notes, "he's not that popular around here at home which is sad, but on the road it's a different story." Fuselier has seen Delafose draw several hundred fans to a dance in the Washington, DC area, home of many white Cajun music and zydeco enthusiasts, "but if he would come right here to Richard's [Club, outside Opelousas,] it would be him and a few of his friends."[58]

Within Louisiana black zydeco fans have shown themselves to be deeply interested in innovation. In 1984, thirty years after his brief regional fame, Boozoo Chavis returned with an overpowering live show that proved irresistible to local dancers. In some ways Chavis was a throwback to zydeco's rural origins. Wearing his omnipresent cowboy hat, he filled his stage patter and lyrics with local references and tales of growing up in the nearby cotton and potato fields, eschewing the Ray Charles and Duke Ellington covers favored by Chenier. He played the older style button accordion, not Chenier's more complex piano accordion. When he chose to, he could play a waltz or two-step in a manner guaranteed to bring older dancers to the floor. More often than not, however, Chavis emphasized pounding energy over melody. He punctuated songs with quick, shouted expressions in both French and English, which brought a jerky staccato to his sound. His drummer underscored this with a heavy and steady double kick on the bass drum, a stylistic innovation that fans came to embrace under the name "double clutchin'." Chavis released two regionally successful albums on Soileau's Maison de Soul label before signing with Rounder, which helped him expand his following. In 1989 the

company released the Billington-produced Zydeco Live, drawn from a Sunday evening club performance that paired Chavis with another local favorite, Nathan and the Zydeco Cha-Chas. The label followed this with the first-ever album release of Chavis's 1950s singles and, in 1993, with Boozoo, That's Who, produced by Terry Adams of the eclectic rock band NRBQ.[59]

Chavis's biggest impact was right at home. Explains Louisiana zydeco musician Sean Ardoin, "After Boozoo came out, if you weren't playing with a double kick, no one wanted to hear you. So everyone started using it."[60] It was Chavis's energetic live shows that inspired Andrus Espree, who gained extraordinary regional influence using the name Beau Jocque. In 1986, already in his thirties, non-musician Espree was a licensed electrician and a married father of two when an oil field accident left him temporarily disabled. To help pass the time, he taught himself the button accordion and some of the old Creole tunes his father used to play. As his interest in the instrument grew, he and his wife began venturing out to see local zydeco bands. Deciding that he could front his own band, Espree engaged in a meticulous—and thoroughly commercial—analysis of what kept dancers on their feet. "I'd watch the crowd. when they got real excited, I'd try to figure out what was happening. I realized that when you get the whole thing going just right, it's going to move the crowd." Adopting a childhood nickname, Espree formed a band and began marketing himself aggressively to local clubs. Realizing that he needed a record as a promotional tool, he financed one himself, releasing My Name Is Beau Jocque on the small Lanor Records label of Lake Charles.[61]

Beau Jocque invested in a state-of-the-art audio system that allowed him to play his music at top volume, even in small clubs with inferior house sound. With this, he

developed a high-energy stage show built around a non-stop pounding rhythm in which the double clutchin' bass drum was as prominent as the accordion. With his deep booming voice, he barked out minimalist lyrics that were often little more than shouted refrains, developing neither melody nor story line but serving merely as one more percussive device. Many of his tunes, such as "Git It, Beau Jocque," "Beau Jocque Boogie," and "Beau Jocque Run," consisted of brief lyrical phrases that did little more than exalt the presence of the charismatic frontman. The style, which owes far more to funk and hip-hop than it does to blues or jazz, let alone Cajun and Creole folk tunes, brought young black Louisianans streaming into local clubs and condemned everything that had gone before into at least momentary oblivion. Geno Delafose's relative inability to find a black audience at home was a problem shared by others. Those who could not rely on touring income suffered. One of these was Lawrence "Black" Ardoin, who had recorded for Arhoolie and appeared on Rounder's early, Spitzer-produced Creole collection. "Today," he says, "at black zydeco clubs if they can't hear and feel the bass drum, they'll just stand there and watch. That's why I'm on the food stamp line right now. Because of Beau Jocque. He's the one that did it."[62]

As Beau Jocque began thrilling audiences around Louisiana, club owner Kermon Richard urged Billington to hear him. The producer found what he loved—"somebody coming out of this tradition and just lighting a fire under the whole thing."[63] Beau Jocque ultimately recorded five albums for Rounder before his sudden death from a heart attack in 1999 at the age of 46. Billington acknowledges that it was difficult to translate Beau Jocque's power to recordings, particularly over the course of multiple releases. In concert the performer provided dancers with a fairly constant percussive attack, designed to keep

them on their feet. Beau Jocque's albums display his unique performing style but Billington recognized that they needed more variety if the artist was to sustain a recording career. Record buyers, particularly if they are to become repeat buyers, need to hear songs that are distinguishable from one another. Billington expressed the dilemma concisely. "The challenge with recording Beau Jocques was to capture [his] energy in the studio, while making songs that could be interesting listening even if you weren't a dancer."[64] The artist and producer attacked this problem by including within albums a selection of popular songs they hoped would suit the bandleader's unique style. They recorded "Keep A-Knockin," an oft-recorded song best known through Little Richard's thoroughly manic 1957 rock hit. They covered "Tighten' Up," a dance hit from another era made famous by its originators Archie Bell and the Drells. Most bizarrely, they offered Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" at a lugubriously—and, for Beau Jocque, uncharacteristically—slow tempo.

As Beau Jocque's rapping, highly percussive approach became the standard to meet around Louisiana clubs, some lovers of tradition were openly disdainful. At one of Marc Savoy's jams in 2000, an older white music fan with whom I conversed referred to the style, with obvious contempt, as "zyderap." More well-meaning commentators sometimes call it "noveau zydeco," a term meant to distinguish it from the work of Chenier or the straightforward and lovely waltzes played by Amedee Ardoin in the thirties. While those who use the phrase are attempting respect, or at least neutrality, it draws an angry reaction from Sean Ardoin, accordionist, drummer, bandleader and one of the younger members of the famed musical family. He sees the term as one of separation, designed to divorce the contemporary sound from its presumably more authentic

forebears. In response, he offers a concise lesson in the meaning of heritage and the process of tradition:

> The term 'noveau' implies that our music is a fad, when in actuality we've been here doing it all along. We're 'noveau' as opposed to what? We're where it's happening. We are where it started. We are the indigenous people who support and create and refine the music. So why are we noveau? We are what the people in southwestern Louisiana call zydeco, yet some writer not from here wants to put us in a box and label us noveau?[65]

Laying claim to his family and racial traditions, Ardoin dismisses the offerings of every white musician who ventures into zydeco, a group that includes BeauSoleil, Bruce Daigrepont, and the Mamou Playboys:

> We [African-Americans] lost rock 'n' roll outright, and we've basically lost blues and jazz. I just hope the same won't happen to us [here in Louisiana]. A lot of people outside Louisiana hear some of these newer Cajun bands who mix a zydeco vibe into their music, and think, 'Oh, so that's zydeco.' We need to be able to maintain our identity.[66]

Ardoin correctly assesses zydeco's popularity among a fervent coterie of white fans who dance to the all-encompassing "Louisiana" sounds of white local bands throughout the U.S. These bands, for the most part, avoid the funk and rap elements that found favor among Louisiana blacks in the 1990s. It remains uncertain whether those newer forms of zydeco will endure. Throughout the 1990s Rounder helped document and sculpt the contemporary sound with releases by Chavis, Beau Jocques, Li'l Brian and the Zydeco Travelers and Chris Ardoin, accompanied by his brother Sean and their appropriately named band Double Clutchin'. Today both Beau Jocques and Chavis are dead and the others have all moved on to smaller labels. Billington, speaking in the fall of 2002, noted that both "Cajun and zydeco sales are way off from where they were a few

years ago, and, believe me, recording Cajun and zydeco was never a way to get rich to begin with."[67] Sid Williams, proprietor of El-Sid O's Zydeco and Blues Club in Lafayette, confirms that local support for zydeco has waned. Williams founded the club in 1983 at the urging of Dural, his friend and neighbor, and Buckwheat Zydeco was the room's debut act. Over the next 20 years the club hosted all of the zydeco greats and Rounder recorded a live album there in 1991, featuring an array of local talent. A dozen years later Williams complained that the crowds are "not coming out like they used to. . . I spent two hundred thousand dollars on zydeco, to try to keep it going, and hell, it looks like nobody don't care. They just don't give a damn." He is hanging on, oddly enough, through disco. White tourists now provide the primary patronage for his declining zydeco offerings. Acknowledging that he would sell the club if he could, Williams said, "it's not that the club is not known, it's just that we don't have the people coming in."[68]

Folklorist Alan Jabbour, in discussing old-time music, observed a cycle of obsolescence and rebirth that he suspects is necessary for the health of traditional forms. Peter Schwarz, drawing on his experience with the Mamou Playboys, concludes that periods of progressive experimentation are also crucial to the preservation of older traditions. Arguably, what Schwarz calls accelerated "evolution" in response to the demands of commercial touring simply confirms Marc Savoy's fear—the insatiable needs of the entertainment industry distort the "road tested rules and guidelines" that constitute tradition. Schwarz sees it differently. In his view sometimes radical experimentation encourages interest in the roots. The "wider we cast our net," Schwarz says of the Playboys, "the better the core of what we do—the [traditional] Cajun music—gets for us and for our audience, because it stays fresh. If we do the whole show—Two-Step, Waltz,

Two-Step, Waltz—it gets real stale, not just for us but for the audience. But when you have that variety and you come back to the [more traditional] Cajun stuff, damn it sounds good."[69]

In 1997 the Playboys detoured briefly from their relationship with Rounder to record Friday At Last for Swallow Records. It is an album filled with sounds that have dominated Louisiana dancehalls for decades. A few originals that fit well within established traditions share space with tunes written by or associated with Cajun and Creole pioneers dating back to the twenties. Fiddles and accordions dominate the mix. It is just what Floyd Soileau needed to reach the regional market that he knows so well. He has never been able to place a record with Boston and New York retailers as effectively as Rounder but within Louisiana he outshines outsiders. He placed that album, Schwarz says, in "every little mom and pop" record retailer in Cajun country. Despite its limited distribution, this deliberate return to the roots is the Playboy's single largest seller. Its conservative tone does not represent the overall career path that the musicians desire but it reminded them of their essence, solidified their base and fueled the next round of innovation.[70]

The same cyclical movement between tradition and innovation may reenergize zydeco in its Louisiana home. Whether rejuvenation will come through the more traditional sounds currently exemplified by Geno Delafose or through some new unexpected hybrid is unknown. Scott Billington may be correct in claiming that the popularity of traditional forms in the commercial sphere is "personality based." That is not, however, a particularly new phenomenon. Every musical development, whether embraced by a community or not, whether ultimately characterized as traditional or not,

begins with a musician who wants to be heard, whether by his or her neighbors or by the entire world. Every innovative musical sound, no matter how closely allied to earlier sounds, begins with a personal artistic impulse and such impulses, no matter how commercially motivated, can invigorate long-lived but dormant traditions. No less a personage than Clifton Chenier, the King of Zydeco, summed it up:

> So now when I come up and made a hit . . . see, black people don't even wanna hear talk of accordions. They don't even want to listen to you. But I kept it going, kept it going, now everybody wanna' play accordion. . . I did what I liked and I learnt my own style. . . That's why you got a mind up there . . . think. If somebody play a record some kind of way, you think how you could make it the other kind of way. Yeah. Think. . . You make your own style.[71]

Chenier's remark echoes that of Ed Haley, the seminal old-time Kentucky fiddler who bragged that he liked to "flavor up a tune so that nobody in the world could tell what I'm playing."[72] Each musician demonstrated respect for the past and the personal desire to build upon existing musical forms. That respect and desire are the essential prerequisites for the preservation of heritage. I have no doubt that there is a particular ineffable beauty in culturally-based artistry that is expressed by one with deep intra-cultural roots. Nonetheless, a musician's insider or outsider status is not dispositive of whether he or she will dilute or invigorate a given cultural form. What matters is the degree of respect shown to the culture, the willingness to master past forms and the skill needed to communicate those forms in a manner meaningful to contemporary audiences. Where those essentials exist, relative measures of traditionalism or progressivism are largely irrelevant. Audiences who enjoy an artist will sense the respect and knowledge inherent

within a performance. That, by itself, will help invigorate the culture, if only for a moment. The accumulation of such moments can help traditional forms survive.

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[1] Clifton Chenier, interview by Ben Sandmel in Cajun Music: A Reflection Of A People, Volume 1, ed. Ann Allen Savoy, 375, 381 (Eunice, LA: Bluebird Press, Inc., 1984).

[2] On the political and racial overtones of Cajun music and zydeco within Louisiana, see Mark Mattern, Acting in Concert: Music, Community and Political Action (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[3] Barry Jean Ancelet, The Makers of Cajun Music (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 19-20.

[4] Ibid., 16; On Boogie Bill Webb see Rick Olivier and Ben Sandmel, Zydeco! (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 18.

[5] A "distinct twin fiddling:" Ancelet, Makers of Cajun Music, 19. For a detailed treatment of Cajun musical development see Barry Jean Ancelet, Cajun Music: Its Origins and Development (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1989); The Lomax Louisiana field recordings are anthologized with detailed notes on Cajun and Creole Music: The Classic Louisiana Recordings, 1934/1937, Volumes 1 and II, Rounder 11661-1842-2 and 11661-1843-2 (released originally on Swallow Records in 1987); on the Falcon recording, see Herman Fuselier, "The First Cajun Record," Offbeat, August 2003, 30.

[6] Alan Lomax, "Introduction," liner notes to Cajun and Creole Music (unpaginated). On zydeco, generally, see Michael Tisserand, The Kingdom of Zydeco (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998) and Olivier and Sandmel, Zydeco. Each provides detail on the lives and careers of selected musicians. On Amedee Ardoin's influence see Savoy, Cajun Music, 66 and Olivier and Sandmel, Zydeco, 35-36.

[7] Ancelet, Makers of Cajun Music, 24-27; John Broven, South to Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1983), Chapters 1 and 2 passim; on the etymology of "coonass" see Shane K. Bernard, The Cajuns: The Americanization Of A People (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 96-97.

[8] On the development of contemporary Cajun music see, generally, Broven, South to Louisiana and Savoy, Cajun Music and Ancelet, Cajun Music: Its Origins. Johnnie Allan quoted by John Broven, liner notes to the audio recording Allons Cajun Rock and Roll, Ace CDCHD 367. Aldus Roger, interview by Savoy in Cajun Music, 196.

[9] Jeff Hannusch, "Masters of Louisiana Music: Wilson Anthony 'Boozoo' Chavis," Offbeat, July 2003, 14; Jeff Hannusch, liner notes to the audio recording Boozoo Chavis, The Lake Charles Atomic Bomb (Original Goldband Recordings), Rounder CD 2097.

[10] "One part:" catspaw49, "What Is Zydeco," Mudcat Cafe, 10 June 1999, <http://www.mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=11475> (accessed 25 February 2005). Other Mudcat quotations in this paragraph were posted by Mudjack and Kris, each on 10 June 1999 and available at the same web address.

[11] Jeff Hannusch, "Masters of Louisiana Music: Clifton Chenier," Offbeat, July 2000, 20; Greg Durst, liner notes to the audio recording Zydeco Dynamite: The Clifton Chenier Anthology, Rhino CD R2 71194.

[12] Hannusch, "Masters: Clifton Chenier;" Durst, Zydeco Dynamite.

[13] Strachwitz quoted in Hannusch, "Masters: Clifton Chenier."

[14] Durst, Zydeco Dynamite; audio recording Clifton Chenier, Louisiana Blues and Zydeco, Arhoolie Records ARH 1024, reissued as Arhoolie CD-329.

[15] Mark Greenberg, "Michael Doucet: Cajun Evolution," Sing Out!, Fall 1990, 2,3.

[16] Rounder Records has released a collection of Rinzler's field recordings as Louisiana French Cajun Music, Volumes 1 and 2, Rounder 6001 and 6002, issued separately in 1976 and now reissued on two CDs.

[17] Dewey Balfa, interview by Savoy in Cajun Music, 236. I also draw my discussion of Balfa's life and career from Harry and Tony Balfa, interview by Savoy, Cajun Music at 242; from Dan Willgang, "Master of Louisiana Music: Dewey Balfa," Offbeat, February 2001, 24; and from Ancelet, Makers of Cajun Music, 29-31, 119-127.

[18] Dick Spottswood, interview by author; Ancelet and Opelousas Daily World quotations from Ancelet, Cajun Music: Its Origins, 37-38; Balfa reported his neighbors' reaction to Margo Blevin of the Augusta Heritage Center, taken from author's interview with Blevin.

[19] Willgang, "Masters: Balfa;" Ancelet, Makers of Cajun Music, 29-31.

[20] Spottswood, interview by author. On the use of heritage for economic development, see Anne Rochell Konigsmark, "Cajun Flavor," Austin American-Statesman, 20 June 1999, D-1.

[21] Greenberg, "Michael Doucet;" for additional information on Doucet see Linda J. Morris, "Beausoleil: The Spirit of Cajun Music," Dirty Linen, October/November 2001, 25.

[22] Greenberg, "Michael Doucet," 4-5.

[23] Michael Doucet, interview by author.

[24] For "the Cajun Grateful Dead" and "the star trail," see Morris, "Beausoleil;" Gregory Himes, review of the audio recording Coteau, Highly Seasoned Cajun Music, Rounder 6078, on Amazon.com (accessed 25 February 2005); Irwin, interview by author. The Coteau album, the only recording the group made, is from a 1997 session that reunited all original members but one. Himes' quoted remarks refer to the band as it played live in the 1970s.

[25] Mattern, Acting In Concert, profiles the Savoys.

[26] I observed these signs on visits to the Savoy Music Center on Thursday, March 16, 2000 and Saturday, March 18, 2000.

[27] All quotations are from Marc Savoy, "An Interview With Myself," unpublished manuscript labeled "3rd Draft 11/6/98," p. 2, 4-5. Given to the author by Marc Savoy at the Savoy Music Center, Eunice Louisiana on March 16, 2000.

[28] Marc Savoy, "An Interview," 7-8.

[29] Herman Fuselier, "Floyd Soileau," Offbeat, January 2001, 48.

[30] Spottswood, interview by author; D.L. Menard, interview by Ann Savoy in Cajun Music, 270. For additional background on Menard and the Aces see Kristin Baggelaar and Donald Milton, Folk Music: More Than A Song (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1979), 232 and Barry Ancelet, liner notes to the audio recording D.L. Menard's Cajun Memories, Swallow Records SW 6125-2. The first Cajun project to which Rounder committed was the release of Ralph Rinzler's field recordings from the 1960s. It took Rinzler some time to prepare the tapes for release, however, and the Aces' record came out first.

[31] Baggelaar, Folk Music; Ancelet, Menard's Cajun Memories.

[32] Spottswood , interview by author; Ken Irwin (A), interview by author; Marian Leighton (B), interview by author**.**

[33] Spottswood, interview by author

[34] Irwin (B), interview by author; Ricky Skaggs, liner notes to the audio recording D.L. Menard, Cajun Saturday Night, Rounder CD 0198.

[35] Leighton (A), interview by author.

[36] Greenberg, "Michael Doucet;" Doucet, interview by author, discussing Irwin's overture.

[37] Daigrepont, interview by author.

[38]Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Tom Druckenmiller, "Off The Beaten Track," Sing Out!, Summer 2001, 118.

[43] Barzas quoted in Geoffrey Himes, "Pour Sauver L'Heritage: Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys," Sing Out!, November/December 1994/January 1995, 22, 25; Riley quoted in Steve Winick, "In With the Old, In With the New," Dirty Linen, December 1996/January 1997, 18.

[44] Winick, "In With the Old."

[45] Peter Schwarz, interview by author.

[46] Irwin (A), interview by author; Schwarz, interview by author.

[47] Schwarz, interview by author.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50]Ibid. The English version of "Laisse-Moi Connaitre" is entitled "Let Me Know." Both versions appear on the audio recording Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, Bayou Ruler, Rounder CD 6083.

[51] Edwin P. Hollander, Principles and Methods of Social Psychology, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 485.

[52] Schwarz, interview by author.

[53] Nick Spitzer, liner notes to the audio recording Zodico: Louisiana Creole Music, Rounder 6009. Spitzer explains that the spelling of "zodico" that he uses as his title "is one found on posters advertising dances and promoting bands in south Louisiana and southeast Texas." He notes alternate spellings, including "zydeco," which by then was used widely.

[54] Scott Billington, interview by author.

[55] Ted Fox, "The Buckwheat Zydeco Story," liner notes to the audio recording The Buckwheat Zydeco Story: A 20-Year Party, Tomorrow Recordings TMR 70002-2. Olivier and Sandmel, Zydeco, 110-131.

[56] Billington, interview by author.

[57] Billington and Delafose quotations are from Scott Billington, liner notes to the audio recording Geno Delafose and French Rockin' Boogie, La Chanson Perdue Rounder CD 2151.

[58] Herman Fuselier, interview by Hadley Castille of the What Bayou Trading Co., Opelousas, LA. The interview appears at <http://www.whatbayou.com /hermanfuselier. html>, (accessed on 7 June 2003).

[59] On Chavis generally see Olivier and Sandmel, Zydeco, 64-91 and Hannusch, "Masters: Chavis."

[60] Christopher Blagg, "Spilling the (snap) Beans on Zydeco: An Ardoin Family Perspective," Offbeat, September 2001, 60, 62.

[61] Espree quoted in Jeff Hannusch, "Masters of Louisiana Music: Andrus 'Beau Jocque' Espree," Offbeat, May 2002, 24, 25.

[62] Blagg, "Spilling the (snap) Beans," 62-63.

[63] Billington, interview by author.

[64] Scott Billington, "Up Close with Scott Billington," an interview on the electronic journal Zydeco Road, at <http://www.zydecoroad.com/upclose/up_close_0902.shtml> (accessed 27 February 2005).

[65] Blagg, "Spilling the (snap) Beans," 63.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Billington, "Up Close."

[68] Craig Guillot, "Sid Williams: The High Price of Zydeco," Offbeat, September 2003, 58.

[69] Jabbour, interview by author; Schwarz, interview by author.

[70] Schwarz, interview by author.

[71] Chenier, interview by Sandmel in Savoy, Cajun Music, 374.

[72] Haley quoted in Mark Wilson and Guthrie T. Meade, liner notes to the audio recording Parkersburg Landing, Rounder 1010.

8

LIKE POLITICS IN CHICAGO
The Folk Alliance Strives For Unity

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s many committed revivalists and vernacular music proponents searched for ways to ensure the artistic vitality and economic survival of their musical passions. Entrepreneurs built their small record labels and specialty publications. The staffs of non-profit organizations offered classes or staged concerts. Hobbyists tended to their song circles and jam sessions, occasionally bringing in a guest artist to perform for a small fee. Collectively, these activists formed a loose-knit folk music "industry" that fostered appreciation of the vernacular arts and tried to maximize professional opportunities for performing folk musicians. While they did not necessarily yearn for the return of the national spotlight, some of them did want to enhance communication among themselves. They believed they could do a better job if they had ready access to practical information regarding performers, programming and promotion. Some hoped additionally to recapture the sense of community that drew them to folk music in the first place. In the absence of media attention, they wanted the intangible comfort that comes from knowing that one is part of a unified movement, larger than oneself. To fulfill any of these goals, some degree of communication across local lines was essential. Unfortunately, given that so many activities were ill-funded and dependent upon volunteers, communication was difficult. In an effort to foster needed connections, California activists Elaine and Clark Weissman spearheaded the creation of the Folk Alliance in 1989. A self-styled trade organization for the vernacular music industry, the

Alliance serves as a forum in which a diverse and often fractious artistic community has struggled to contain its divisions and work for common goals.

The Alliance's survival is remarkable given the many similar efforts that failed in the years following the great boom. In 1977 one folksong society activist wrote to dozens of organizations suggesting the exchange of newsletters and the sharing of ideas and experiences with the goal of "mutual growth." Foreshadowing the Folk Alliance, he envisioned a "state-wide or regional league of societies, pooling resources" and, possibly, "a low-profile convention once a year with songfests, workshops on organization, incorporation, etc. . . ." Regrettably, nothing came of this overture. The Philadelphia Folksong Society was the only organization that replied.[1] In 1980 New Lost City Rambler Tracy Schwarz sought to encourage unity among musicians with respect to one particular economic issue. Concerned about the low fees offered professional folk musicians, he urged performers to boycott those venues that failed to pay a fair wage.[2] Though Schwarz identified a genuine problem, it was not one necessarily rooted in promoter avarice and thus not necessarily something that even a fair promoter, acting alone, could solve. In the absence of media attention and adequate promotion, folk audiences were often small and unable to generate the revenue that allowed large fees. Suitable venues were often widely dispersed. Unless several venues existed within a compact region, the cost of travel and lodging prevented many performers from profiting at those venues that did exist. It did not make economic sense, for example, to journey from the east coast to the southwest to perform a single concert, even if the promoter paid a fair fee.[3] Any solution demanded a multi-faceted approach—more venues, more high-caliber booking agents, better promotional skills and enhanced communication within the

industry so small scale performers and presenters could find one another and reach an audience.

In September 1980 Minneapolis folk activists sparked a concerted effort to address the overall economic plight of the working folk performer. Expressing a variety of concerns, including low fees, the cost of travel and lodging, music industry chicanery and the need for health insurance, thirty-one performers held a "rendezvous" at which they formed the nucleus of Hey Rube!, an artists' guild "devoted to the advancement of traditional performing arts as a trade." The playful name came from the historic cry for assistance used by performers in carnivals, circuses and vaudeville shows. Among other things, the organization sought "to perpetuate through the artist the public's participation in the folk traditions, and to create and maintain a good working environment through the exchange of information and mutual support." Working with an initial mailing list of 200 interested parties, a twelve-member steering committee began developing a permanent structure and creating a newsletter. Activists assembled a nationwide list of folk music venues, helped establish a group health plan for touring musicians, put out an intermittent newsletter and organized several musicians' get-togethers. It was an industrious and worthy effort but one that proved to be short lived. Traveling folk musicians could not afford either the time or the money needed to write and distribute the newsletter or even to attend regular meetings. The venue list, which proved useless without constant updating, prompted promoter complaints about unceasing calls from musicians who were completely unknown to them, and who thus could not be booked. By the fall of 1984, Sing Out! reported that Hey Rube! was dying.[4]

Less than a year later, one more optimistic organizer tried again. Performer Michael Cooney used his Sing Out! column to solicit names and addresses for a proposed "database of performers and clubs, coffeehouses, etc." Recognizing the difficulty facing anyone who tried to keep track of the many local scenes, he sought help from readers. "Is there anything happening in Tucson?" he asked. "Portland? Houston? Kansas City? I'd really like to hear." Cooney subsequently reported a handful of responses received from disparate organizations but no publicly available database ever appeared.[5] One attempt at purely local coordination fared better at least for a time. Stephen Baird, a Boston musician, coffeehouse manager, street performer and all-around folk music gadfly, found Hey Rube!'s grand aspirations intriguing but flawed. A major problem, as he saw it, was that the organization's "national Gig List" served merely to encourage the more efficient division of existing work, as opposed to what he considered the more fruitful approach of "working together to create new work." More significantly, Baird saw Hey Rube!'s structure as an undemocratic "artists-against-the-world routine." It granted voting rights to full-time professional performers but relegated "facilitators"—club owners, record companies, agents, managers, disc jockeys—to non-voting "associate" status. To Baird, these business people were "pillars" of the folk world. He viewed their marginal status within Hey Rube! as a suicidal failure of community separating performers from the technical and financial resources they needed to survive. He sympathized with the concerns of Tracy Schwarz but recognized that low fees were merely a symptom of other problems that demanded a broader corrective. [6]

Nonetheless Baird saw promise in Hey Rube!'s goal of industry organization. He set out to improve the model on a more manageable scale. Distributing flyers around

Boston in the spring of 1982, he announced a meeting of performers, coffeehouse proprietors and anyone else interested in discussing "common concerns and issues within the acoustic, traditional and folk music community." He was not certain where he was headed and did not know if he was creating a local branch of Hey Rube! or something entirely new. The meeting led to the birth in April 1983 of the Folk Arts Network (FAN) with Baird as its Director. FAN took root and grew into an ambitious local service organization. It conducted seminars on business practices, provided opportunities for artists to meet the media and financial communities, organized teaching opportunities for artists and compiled a comprehensive directory of local folk musicians and organizations. Through it all Baird adhered to his fervent belief—one that proved crucial to the ultimate survival of the Folk Alliance—that the folk community included not only musicians and fans but also the business people who create opportunities to record, perform and listen to music.[7]

Hoping to expand, Baird reached out to other activists. One was Margo Blevin, director of the Augusta Heritage Center, a program dedicated to preserving the culture and heritage of West Virginia. Augusta offers year-round instruction in traditional music, dance, crafts and folklore. Students can study banjo, fiddle and "gospel piano," among other things, and participate in weeklong workshops devoted to bluegrass, blues, Cajun music and other vernacular styles. It also funds apprenticeships between students and masters in diverse traditional arts, records traditional musicians and presents them in public performance.[8] In the late 1980s, the precise year lost to her memory, Blevin attended a Boston meeting organized by FAN for the purpose of discussing immigration rules that made it prohibitively expensive to bring non-commercial traditional musicians

into the U.S. from abroad. She returned to West Virginia tremendously excited by this "wonderful meeting" and the prospect of "what people could do when they get together and talk about these things." Around the same time, Blevin wrote to musicians John McCutcheon and David Holt, along with others interested in traditional music, suggesting that they organize in some fashion to foster the sharing of information and ideas. People were interested but the usual problems prevailed—their schedules were too tight, their funds too limited and their organizations too understaffed. The idea never grew beyond the talking stage.[9]

Sonny Thomas of the Fiddle and Bow Folk Music Society also believed that he and folk music in general could benefit from better coordination. Thomas, a social worker from North Carolina's Winston-Salem region, helped found Fiddle and Bow in 1981, believing that an ongoing organization of fans would help draw professional folk musicians to the area for performances. Organized as a coffeehouse with a membership base, Fiddle and Bow began to hear almost immediately from artists and booking agents eager for a new venue. The new room caught on and provided touring musicians with one more place to play while traveling to or from larger markets in Atlanta or Washington, DC. However, the club faced that age-old problem—with relatively few professional folk venues in the Southeast, many musicians could not afford to tour in the area. Like others before him, Thomas realized that he could draw more talent if he could assure performers of several paydays at multiple venues within an easy day's drive from one another. Toward that end Fiddle and Bow hosted a weekend get together for folk promoters, drawing people from West Virginia, Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina. They found that they all did things differently. Some staged weekly shows on a shoestring; others

presented one well-funded concert each month. Realizing their differences, no one saw any potential in networking and no one, including Thomas, had the wherewithal to keep trying. They parted having had a good time but with no plans to continue and with no one responsible for keeping the effort alive.[10]

Given the pressures on a largely volunteer population chronically short of money and time, any successful effort to organize folk revivalists on a large scale required a tenacious and somewhat visionary personality. In the mid-1980s that organizer surfaced in the person of Elaine Weissman. In the summer of 1988 readers of Sing Out! encountered a one-column notice that Weissman placed in the magazine's back pages headed "Important Announcement!!! Formative Meeting Of A North American Folk Music Association." It called upon "interested leaders" of folk music organizations throughout the continent to attend a "signal event in the history of folk music"—a meeting in Malibu, California designed to "open lines of communication between these organizations, and create a strong voice for the folk music community." Referring to unspecified "national and international issues threatening folk music," the notice called for "integrated action" embracing "all segments of the industry," including "artists, agents, media, recording, government, festivals, societies, arts councils, and individual supporters."[11]

This tiny notice was only one small component of Elaine and Clark Weissman's years-long effort to create a continent-wide folk music organization. As Clark explained:

> Elaine woke up one day and had this vision . . . But to make it happen didn't just happen in Malibu, and the convincing wasn't the week before. My job took me for a number of years around the country, and while other people went vacationing, we visited festivals. And we didn't go to the music sessions; we got behind

> the scenes and talked to the organizers. And we found out that they had problems with volunteers, they had problems with the arts organizations, they had problems with musicians, the musicians had problems with the organizers. And then we'd go to another festival, and they would have the same problems— different color, different city, different finances but the same problems. We would talk to endless numbers of folk societies. We at one time were members of about 700 of them; just swapping newsletters and talking to them. And they had the same problems. And we said, 'Why are we divided? We all have the same problems. We're people trying to enjoy this kind of music, which is unaccepted somehow in the community. There's a lack of a food chain, of financial sustenance, to this business and it has to be restructured and we need the massive strength that we have to make it happen.' So Elaine had this vision and we talked to a lot of people, . . .[12]

Determined to reach beyond the borders of the U.S., Elaine sought the participation of Gary Cristall and Anne Blaine of the well-established Vancouver Folk Festival. According to Blaine, who ended up going to Malibu, she 'bugged us and bugged us and bugged us."[13] Elaine also called Shelly Romalis, an anthropology professor at the University of Toronto and director of The Woods, a Canadian folk music camp for those who enjoyed making informal music with others. Romalis did not know Elaine but found her charming and sensed her determination, understanding quickly that the Malibu meeting was "her baby and her dream." She was excited by the prospect of a "cross-borders" folk music organization. That promise has not been fulfilled, since the Alliance has never managed to attract organizations and musicians from Mexico or Central America. Romalis, however, was eager to help establish Canadian participation. She journeyed to Malibu as one of seven Canadians in attendance.[14]

Blevin was tremendously impressed by the passion with which Weissman approached her task. The two did not know each other but Weissman called anyway,

delighted when she found a sympathetic believer in the need for communication and unity. Blevin recalls her saying, "All the people involved with traditional music and dance should get together and talk, all in one place. We never see each other, we never meet each other, you do your festival, I do my festival." Blevin was willing but her schedule always seemed to preclude immediate commitment. Weissman kept calling. She called several times a year for roughly three years and at the end of each conversation she would ask, "'Where and when?' She is a very practical person," Blevin explains, "where, when?" Finally Weissman issued a challenge, paraphrased by Blevin: "I'm ready to move. Are you with me or aren't you. It's going to be in Malibu . . . and it's going to be on such-and-such a date. Will you do it with me? Will you help?" The two made up a list of the "must call" people and Weissman then made another round of calls, gathering commitments and dropping the names of anyone who had even hinted they would attend. Ultimately, Blevin believes, people came because they feared being left out.[15]

Weissman's effort culminated in a meeting of approximately 130 folk music activists at a Jewish summer camp in Malibu, California, held from January 19 through January 22, 1989. Sandy and Caroline Paton spent some time with the Weissmans shortly before the conference began and attained some insight into their goals. The Patons had been active professionally in folk music circles since the 1950s as song collectors, performers and the founding owners of Folk-Legacy Records. They understood the fledging organization as one devoted to the public advocacy of the traditional arts and the enhancement of professionalism among those who present them. In Sandy's words its goal was "to make more professional the promotion of traditional music—of folk music—in the various organizations around the country that pay tribute to it," whether

they be small coffeehouse, festivals or local folk societies. "Many of the people that were doing folk music programs," he adds, "were not really terribly sophisticated in promotion and [the Weissmans believed] that exchanging ideas with others who were doing it, maybe more successfully, could help increase their market share in the various communities in which they produced their performances." The underlying hope was that with enhanced professionalism those organizations might increase "the interest in folk music, the awareness of it . . . as an alternative to more commercial forms of music."[16]

The Weissmans organized the conference around a series of themed discussions. There were separate sessions on both small and large folk societies, festivals and "schools, camps and art centers." There was a session directed to the work of agents, one focused on print and radio media and another that discussed government grants.[17] Participants were all true believers, eager to talk. "It was a block from the ocean," Blevin recalls, "and we never went to the ocean until the last day. We were in this room, in this pressure cooker of a space talking non-stop with people who cared passionately about the same things that we did. So it was tremendously exciting," she says, "and if we had done nothing else but just sit and talk to each other for a weekend that would have been really valuable."[18] While the formal sessions provided an ice-breaking framework and a hint of what could be, the overriding focus was the need to do that which had not yet been done successfully—create an ongoing structure. After a couple of days spent in formal discussion, it appeared that the Weissmans' careful organization might defeat this goal. "The nearly fatal flaw of the weekend," Blevin says, "it that it was over-organized." There were so many formal sessions that there was "literally no time in the schedule left to discuss, absorb, evaluate and vote on whatever we were there to produce." Eventually

a small group rebelled. Following a private discussion they recommended that all attendees agree to abandon the formal schedule in favor of a working session focused upon ultimate goals. Seeing overwhelming support for this proposal, the Weissmans "graciously scrapped their meticulously crafted schedule. A flip chart and easel were dragged out, and the work of forming, defining, and naming the new organization began at once. This is the precise moment," Blevin explains, "that the gathering became an organization."[19]

There was no immediate agreement regarding the nature of this organization. Many of the participants were adrift in this regard—curious and hopeful but without any particular idea of what might emerge. Sonny Thomas, recalling his own unsuccessful effort at broader organization, came with the attitude that he would "wait and see" if something more lasting could develop, though he had no idea what that might be. Blevin was one of several traditionalists who hoped the organization could resemble the fiddling contests or music camps held at Augusta and elsewhere. George Balderose, a booking agent who represents performers of traditional music, envisioned a regularly scheduled folk music festival with time set aside for meeting and sharing information. Thinking in business terms from the start, Balderose thought that his agency could be an early beneficiary of the emergent Alliance because it would allow him to meet promoters he did not know, as well as those he knew only through phone conversations. As far as he could determine the Weissmans had no particular model in mind beyond something that was "big." Canada's Romalis, on the other hand, remains uncertain that the Weissmans ever wanted anything big.[20] Just how big the Alliance would become and what being "big" meant became a source of concern and conflict throughout the Malibu conference

and in the years ahead. It was one of several issues concerning the fledgling organization's identity that was wound up with deeper questions regarding the nature of folk music, the meaning of a folk community and how the "idea of the folk" meshed with the reality of American life at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Despite the open invitation placed in Sing Out!, Weissman had not left Malibu attendance to chance, as demonstrated by her long telephone campaign and the final "must call" list crafted with Blevin. As a result, most attendees favored folk music with a traditional flavor, as opposed to the more contemporary sounds of the singer-songwriters. They tended to play influential roles in established folk arts organizations, both commercial—such as Balderose's booking agency—and non-profit, such as Augusta Heritage. They also tended to be over 35, white and influenced to a considerable degree by the great boom. But there were philosophical differences among them, the starkest being that between those who saw themselves as proponents of the so-called "backyard" or "back porch" players and those with an overtly commercial orientation. As Ann Blaine put it, there was a fear of "the P word"—"professional." In the more expansive words of Sonny Thomas, "There was some hesitancy [in adopting a business model] on the part of people who see folk music as kind of a participatory, back porch kind of thing . . . and some reluctance to make it [businesslike] for fear of what would happen to it. There have been some negative things along those lines."[21]

In short, the backyard players were afraid of creating an organization that would bring back the worst commercial excesses of the sixties. To a degree, the larger an organization, the more the backyard partisans considered it suspect. To have a large budget, the theory went, an organization needed to draw a large audience, which meant it

needed to cater more to broad popular tastes, which meant it needed to enter the realm of show business, not folk music. As summarized by Juel Ulven, founder of the all-volunteer Fox Valley Folklore Society of Aurora, Illinois, "Malibu ended up being a struggle between the small organizations and the big organizations and there was a whole lot of distrust."[22] The divide was not always black and white. Instead it reflected relative points along a continuum, with many facing the eternal paradox of desiring promotion while fearing its impact. In this they were no different from aficionados of any niche interest who want to trumpet their passion while fearing the broader attention that might make it less special or change it irrevocably. A few proponents of greater professionalism attacked backyard players on two fronts. They accused them of being naïve, with one representative refrain being, "Oh, you backyard players, if we listen to you we'll never get off the ground."[23] Some who favored a business orientation saw hypocrisy in the laments of relatively privileged, often well-educated urbanites who seemed intent on preserving not just musical styles but their idealized image of an older, decidedly harsher rural lifestyle. Jim Hirsch, then the executive director of Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, an aggressively self-promoting non-profit with a multi-million-dollar budget, reflected this position in his comments on self-professed proponents of the backyard: "These people aren't keepers of the flame. They're keepers of their own damn flame. . . I think it's a little goofy when people kind of self-appoint to be keepers of this or that. What were they born to? They didn't come out of the backwoods."[24]

Hirsch's comment alluded to another reality that disturbed some—the fact that certain conference attendees appeared to have agendas that went beyond the simple love of music. The apparent power struggles within the Philadelphia Folksong Society

astonished Ulven, who sensed that those in charge of booking did not trust those in charge of security and vice versa, and saw them follow each other around to ensure that neither threatened the other's turf. To him, the infighting looked "like politics in Chicago."[25] Sonny Thomas summed up the factional struggles he saw all around:

> I kind of got the impression that there were some people that wanted to feel like they were players in the folk scene—powerbrokers in the folk scene—which back then was a pretty strange notion and maybe still is considering the nature of the genre. People took things very seriously; just the minute details of working out statements of purpose and things like that. [There was] a lot of argument and debate about how things would be worded and the political correctness of everything, which certainly has to be a concern but it's not something that I would have thought people could be screaming at each other over, which actually happened. There were some very tense moments in those meetings.[26]

At times these divisions indicated little more than differences in personal style. Those successful in business, or in meeting the fundraising and promotional demands of larger non-profit organizations, could display an aggressiveness foreign to those who came to Malibu because of their involvement in a local folk music society or coffeehouse. But stylistic differences resisted any neat dichotomy. Blaine, from the relatively large and long-running Vancouver Folk Festival, saw an east vs. west divide. In her view, some of the easterners brought an aggressive intensity to discussion that she had never before witnessed. Despite her proposed geographic divide, Blaine conceded that she found similar intensity in California's Weissmans, as well as in Chicago's Jim Hirsch, whom she later came to consider an admired friend. Tankle noted that during an initial group phone number exchange Hirsch provided only his office number, not his home number. Perhaps, she surmised with concern, folk music was nothing more than a

business to him. Whatever its source, tension and discord created particular distress among those who, above all else, valued folk music as a source of community. Anguished by the heat of discussion, Blaine returned to her room after one Malibu session and cried.[27]

The distinction between big or commercial or slick, on the one hand, and small or community-oriented or, for want of a better word, "folksy," on the other, manifested itself in the group's first concrete action, the election of a steering committee to draft articles and by-laws and give initial shape to the Alliance. The Weissmans arrived in Malibu with a set of proposed by-laws in hand, a bit of preparation that did nothing but arouse suspicion in those already prone to concern about the organization's design. This suspicion was heightened by the dual belief among some that the proposal favored larger organizations and that the Weissmans hoped to personally select the membership of the Alliance's initial governing body. On the first night, the Weissmans asked a "hand-chosen" group to meet privately. The tenor of the gathering suggested that this group would form the steering committee, recalls Hirsch, who was himself one of the invitees. Thereafter, the Weissmans invited certain individuals to address the larger gathering, investing those chosen with a potentially influential "cachet."[28] The perception of favoritism heightened fears that the largest participants would dominate any national organization. By the third day these concerns led to what Ulven characterized as an "open revolt." "We know you're going out and trying to sell these by-laws to people. We're worried. We're small organizations and you're talking to the big organizations and we think if this gets approved that it's not gonna be a pretty thing."[29]

Democracy carried the day and the group decided to hold an open election. There was discussion of whether steering committee seats should be allocated based on geographic region or "interest" but in the end a consensus emerged to seat a twelve-member committee by allowing each registrant to vote for any twelve from among the 25 who chose to run. Additionally, the group allowed couples to run jointly for a single seat, possessing a single vote. Candidates had an opportunity to state their case and the result was a fifteen-member committee—including three couples—that was reasonably diverse within the context of the older white middle-class revivalists in attendance.[30] Elaine and Clark Weissman won a joint seat. Other committee members included Augusta's Blevin, the Vancouver Folk Festival's Blaine and Balderose, whose small booking agency had a roster weighted toward traditional artists and who was himself a performing bagpiper.

Romalis, Thomas and Ulven all won seats and to varying degrees each of these was as close to a representative of the backyard singer as could be found among the myriad organizational affiliations present. Each had a day job unrelated to music and each headed an organization composed solely of volunteers. "The Woods," Romalis's folk music and dance camp, was perhaps the most informal, providing opportunities for group singing and playing by self-identified folk aficionados. Thomas's Fiddle and Bow was tiny in scale and catered to a purely local audience. Its ongoing dilemma, however, confronted many conference-goers. It survived through ticket sales and this economic reality compelled it to endure a perpetual state of compromise. Given his druthers, Thomas would have preferred to present music from the Celtic and eastern-European traditions but he recognized that neither that music, nor the Appalachian string-band tradition that once flourished on the club's North Carolina doorstep, drew a consistent

audience. He staged as much traditional music as was economically feasible but that was not much. Necessity compelled him to focus on a steady stream of guitar playing singer-songwriters. While this group had its own professional difficulties, it consisted of those members of the folk world most likely to be aggressive professionals armed with recordings and press kits.[31]

With a broader audience base in its suburban Chicago home, Ulven's Fox Valley Folklore Society was able to operate on a larger scale than Fiddle and Bow. That, plus the fact that it favored participatory events such as group sings and dances, allowed Fox Valley to hew closer to relatively non-commercial traditional sounds. Ulven had founded the all-volunteer organization in 1975 and enmeshed it in multiple aspects of folklife, including storytelling as well as music and dance. Usually breaking even, Fox Valley, then and now, hosts roughly 100 events a year, including weekly participatory "sings," regular contra dances, storytelling sessions and an annual festival. Some of these are held in conjunction with other groups, with Fox Valley lending logistical support in exchange for sharing credit, and thus keeping its name in front of the community. A strong traditionalist, Ulven does not see folk music as a particular performance style but as a functional device that accompanies other aspects of life. "If you have music that you can work to or worship to or dance to," he says, "it's probably pretty unassailably folk music . . . There's things that the music developed to address. To some degree it was grief but to a large degree it was work or worship or dance." He knows that much of this music can sound foreign to contemporary ears, accustomed as they are to the more passive reception of hook-laden pop songs. That is why Fox Valley's dances and group sings place such emphasis on participation. True folk music, Ulven believes, "is never done well as

entertainment [before a passive audience]. If you want entertainment," he says, "hire the Rolling Stones."[32]

Although the Patons did earn their living from folk music, they sought and won election as professed advocates of the backyard and were as suited for the role as any long-time folk music professionals could be. Born in 1929, Sandy was an intellectually curious high-school dropout who began a career as an itinerant singer of folk songs in the 1940s. "I was becoming aware, politically, of the importance of paying attention to the working class and the underprivileged. I thought [folk] music spoke to that; these were songs of working people, not art songs, not songs removed from life. It was music that spoke to the needs and concerns of people who were very real to me."[33] In 1957, at a concert in Berkeley, California, he met graduate student Caroline Swenson. He was performing. She was an audience member who asked him the source of a tune. They were married within a few months and soon embarked on a tour of the British Isles that cemented Caroline's role as Sandy's singing partner. Hearing the "big powerful voices" of British ballad singers moved Caroline to try her own hand at harmony. "I was always afraid to sing in public until I met those singers. Their power really was a revelation to me. And what they cared about was the song."[34]

Caring about the song became the Patons' life work, though the arrival of children compelled them to anchor their lives a bit. With a friend, the late Lee Haggerty, they founded Folk-Legacy Records in 1961, initially releasing recordings by the traditional singers that Sandy met while traveling. With son Robin now working in the family business, the label celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2001, operating out of the combined living, performing and work space where the Paton's have lived since 1967.

Modest in scope, Folk-Legacy has released less than 200 recordings, all of which contain songs found in oral tradition or new songs that sound like they could be hundreds of years old. Many of the performers are amateurs, singing songs learned through family or community tradition. The label's distinctive sound, in the words of Sing Out!, presents "a soft acoustic sweetness, a melodiousness, and arrangements that put the song out front." Whether it's an unaccompanied ballad or an intricate vocal harmony fronting an instrumental arrangement, the song itself is always the star. Much like Marc Savoy, the Patons decry performers who seem to say, "Look at me, I'm singing the hell out of this song," preferring those whose style quietly asks their audience to "listen to this wonderful song." Their approach represents the antithesis of the pop music star system that the two disdain. Folk-Legacy has, predictably, never been a high-dollar operation. It has done just fine, however, for two people in whom life, song and the business of folk music are fused. [35]

Dr. Robert Cohen and Dianne Tankle, the husband-wife activists from the all-volunteer Philadelphia Folksong Society, also won a joint seat. Eclectic in their tastes, Cohen and Tankle perceive folk music in terms far broader than either Ulven or the Patons, a position influenced heavily by the multi-faceted nature of the great boom. Once involved extensively in eastern-European folk dancing, Tankle, like her husband, became a huge Kingston Trio fan. They welcome a wide variety of sounds and styles under the folk umbrella. Eschewing the relatively precise functional definition offered by Ulven, Cohen deflects the issue of definition by citing the much-maligned dictum that all songs must be folksongs because horses never sing them. Pressed further, he acknowledges that some songs and styles fall outside any reasonable definition of folk music, while adopting

an "I know it when I hear it" approach that focuses on whether or not a song has a "folkie sound." Pushed still harder for specifics, he can only allow that this sound derives from "the whole gestalt."[36] However imprecise this may be, many folk fans share Cohen's approach, thus displaying a surprising level of agreement about what is and is not folk music in contemporary terms.

The remaining members of the committee were three strong individuals whose attitudes greatly influenced the Alliance's eventual direction. A onetime union electrician, Mark Moss was President of the Penn State Folklore Society during his years as a college student in the early seventies. He was also a founding member of the Lehigh Valley (Pennsylvania) Folksong Society and spent over ten years as a Sing Out! volunteer, helping to organize the magazine's promotional booths at folk festivals. By the summer of 1980, just past its thirtieth anniversary, Sing Out! was on the brink of extinction. Circulation had declined sharply and the magazine faced a $20,000 debt, while subscription revenues failed to cover monthly operating costs. Advertising revenue had also declined. Sensing imminent bankruptcy, creditors who had allowed debt to accumulate for years were now demanding immediate payment. The situation was so dire that the magazine made a dramatic and desperate appeal to its readers for contributions.[37]

In the fall of 1980 Moss became coordinator of the Friends of Sing Out!, a position focused largely on helping readers promote the magazine in any manner possible, whether by drumming up donations or encouraging sales by their local music retailer.[38] He and others threw themselves into the fundraising effort. An editorial published shortly after the appeal thanked Moss for "his enthusiastic efforts organizing festival booths, transcribing interviews, tracking down songs, helping with benefits, and

getting us through rough times."[39] The magazine endured a two-year publication hiatus before emerging debt free in the spring of 1983 with a new, more professional appearance and with Moss as editor.[40] Sing Out! has always been a staunchly collaborative effort but Moss earned the lion's share of the credit for the periodical's rejuvenation. He is a knowledgeable and articulate observer of the folk music scene, thoroughly familiar with both traditional American music and the more contemporary folk sounds of the singer-songwriters. His editorial position gives him a high-profile platform from which he strives to reconcile the goals of community-based music and business professionalism. At the time of the Malibu conference he had served six years as editor. As of 2004 he has served in that position longer than anyone in the magazine's 50-year history.

Jim Hirsch—wiry, fast-talking and possessed of an aggressive, salesman-like persona—was initially the most distrusted member of the committee that emerged from Malibu. His market driven philosophy appeared to have nothing to do with folk music and it drove some of the backyard advocates to distraction. In 1989 Hirsch was the Director of Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, a venerable revival institution. Founded in 1957, the School began by teaching a variety of "folk instruments"—predominantly guitars, banjos and fiddles. Old Town was as much a social club as a school. Students learned in groups and everyone joined in a collective "songfest" when an afternoon or evening class schedule concluded, a tradition soon dubbed "the second half." Regular teacher-student coffee breaks became another early tradition, as did occasional all-night parties, all of which contributed to a deliberately cultivated atmosphere of community. The experiment was a raging popular success and the school's offerings soon

expanded. In the words of co-founder Frank Hamilton, it all stemmed from a vision held by his colleague, Win Stracke—"a vision of a . . . giant meetinghouse for musicians, storytellers, folk dancers, folklorists and professional folk entertainers who would gather to share their knowledge with the public." As the boom gathered steam, virtually every movement figure of note performed concerts on the school's stage, including stylists as diverse as Pete Seeger, Bill Monroe and Mahalia Jackson. One-time students who found fame include Byrds founder Roger McGuinn, singer-songwriter John Prine and Steve Goodman, a veteran recording artist who wrote the legendary "City of New Orleans," a tune made famous by Arlo Guthrie. [41]

Until the mid-1970s the school seemed charmed. A growing demand for music lessons encouraged expansion beyond its original urban base. Branches opened in the Chicago suburbs and optimistic administrators acquired real property, with its accompanying debt and maintenance expenses. But by the late seventies, increasing oil costs and the rise of disco and new wave brought this success to an abrupt halt. Declining enrollment resulted in a huge drop in the tuition payments that constituted the bulk of the school's income. Forced to take stock with a degree of professionalism previously unknown, the school found itself with tax troubles, decaying buildings that violated codes and a huge operating deficit. Its Board responded in a typically idiosyncratic, unprofessional manner. It hired Hirsch as the new director—a man who, by his own admission, was seemingly unqualified for the job. Hirsch's career at Old Town began in 1972 as a guitar teacher at the school's suburban Evanston branch. He became branch director in 1978, despite the absence of either appropriate experience or a college diploma, having dropped out of Southern Illinois University before completing its degree

program in "acoustic music." However, in four years he had made Evanston financially self-sufficient and in 1982 the Board hoped he could do the same for the school as a whole.[42]

Possessed of a demonic work ethic and an almost bionic aura of self-confidence, Hirsch set about his task in a manner never before seen at the Old Town School. In his first month as director he took no salary and began reducing staff and slashing operating expenses. His hunt for new revenue streams mitigated the resulting tension. Thinking counterintuitively, he responded to dwindling enrollment by expanding the nature of classes offered, adding children's programs and songwriting workshops in a successful gamble that new types of classes would draw new students. He rented space in the school to outsiders and turned a previously casual system of musician referrals into a business, acting as an artists' agent and taking a percentage of the musician's fee for performing jobs obtained. The largest single tangible change Hirsch engineered had to do with the school's approach to donations. The casual system he inherited had resulted in contribution totals of $5,000 per year at best. With the help of a fundraising professional, Hirsch organized a program targeting corporate, foundation and individual donors. Within a couple of years he was raising over $100,000 annually and had set even higher goals. Spurred by the complete deterioration of the School's downtown home, Hirsch initiated a capital fund drive, raised $650,000 between 1985 and 1987 and paid for the building's total renovation. He arrived in Malibu in 1989 as the antithesis of the backyard player—an aggressive financial wunderkind whose innate business acumen had transformed a somewhat funky folk music parlor into an entertainment and educational goliath. With a large measure of respect, Ulven argues that Hirsch is not a folkie but a

fundraiser. Referring to the tax code provision governing non-profit organizations, Ulven says, "Jim is a 501(c)(3) driver. I don't know anybody in the not-for-profit sector [like him]. He can raise money cold. He basically can find money in the newspaper."[43] Hirsch's success is accompanied by what some consider a distressing tendency to see his path as the only path. He combines a penchant for sales jargon—referring to music as "product" and audiences as "markets"—with a propensity to lecture. "You guys gotta be professional," he demanded at Malibu. "You can't be doing this [and be] loosey-goosey. You've got to get out there and you've got to promote this." Those content with their small, volunteer-driven song circles were appalled but the strength of Hirsch's vision helped propel the Alliance toward an ethos of professionalism and an acceptance of the marketplace.[44]

The remaining committee member was a man with a unique ability to straddle the revival's disparate worlds. Born in 1955 in Raleigh, North Carolina, Art Menius developed such a strong early fascination with country music that he makes the unusual claim, "I cannot remember not knowing [Bill] Monroe's versions of 'Uncle Pen' and 'Muleskinner Blues.'"[45] After earning a Master's in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Menius became a researcher for that state's Department of Cultural Resources, writing social histories linked to North Carolina historic sites. From there, he joined Linear Productions, where he helped develop Fire on the Mountain, a television series focusing on early country music, produced for The Nashville Network in the early 1980s. To prepare, Menius steeped himself in country music history, working his way through a self-designed scholarly program of study that he claims consumed up to fourteen hours per day through much of 1983. In 1984, Linear Productions undertook a

consulting assignment designed to help the then fairly disorganized bluegrass "industry" better understand its audience. Menius examined bluegrass festivals throughout the nation, dividing them into four categories that delineated geographic and musical differences. He then prepared a survey applicable to each festival type and in the summer of 1984 set out to interview festivalgoers around the nation. The resulting 2,106 completed questionnaires constituted the largest comprehensive survey of bluegrass fans then undertaken.[46]

Next he became publicity director for Liberty Flyer, a syndicated radio show featuring live acoustic music, roughly two-thirds of which was bluegrass. The show eventually ran on 113 stations and, Menius says, "that's where I developed my bluegrass association and radio contacts. So as early as January 1985 I had a better list of bluegrass associations than anybody else, and probably a better handle on press sources that would be interested in bluegrass." These contacts led to Menius's next role. In June 1985 talent agent Lance LeRoy invited him to a Nashville meeting called to discuss the formation of a bluegrass trade association. By that fall, the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) was up and running and executive director Art Menius was its first hire. It was his job to weld a loose network of relatively small independent record companies, talent agencies, promoters and specialty publications into a genuine industry; one that could enhance appreciation of bluegrass among the public and thus provide musicians—and their support structure—with a greater opportunity to earn a living. [47]

Bluegrass is rooted in traditional southern folk tunes and lyrical themes and its commercial development sets it apart from present-day mainstream country music. As Mark Fenster notes in his analysis of the IBMA, many bluegrassers—whether musicians,

fans or supporting entrepreneurs—are "concerned with the music as a cultural entity rather than as a mere commodity." For most of them the goal "is the formation of a nonintrusive commercial structure by which bluegrass can be successfully produced and distributed without despoiling the music of its integrity and traditions."[48] In other words, to be successful Menius needed to straddle the worlds of mass-marketing and community tradition, of "backyard picking" and radio promotion, the very skills that would well serve the fledgling Folk Alliance. As it happens, Menius is an ardent, unabashed advocate of commercial promotion who does not believe that this necessitates the compromise of musical or cultural values. What intrigued him about the promise of the Alliance was the possibility of moving beyond a focus on bluegrass, with the hope that niche or independent musics of all types could band together "to create a big market of the little markets." "My intent," he writes, "was and always has been to advance the business aspects and improve the bottom line . . . My position is that a market exists for this music, and that market can be increased . . . I remain steadfast that the route of selling records and tickets is the only true route to preservation of roots."[49] In this he aligns himself strongly with Hirsch, of whom he writes, "Jim has stood for more than a decade on the front line of developing folk music institutions that business people can respect and, thus, donate funds to."[50]

The significance of Art Menius stemmed from the fact that, despite his staunch commercial outlook, he did not threaten the backyard singers and small-group volunteers. While Hirsch's city-slicker, salesman style made him an object of suspicion, folk revival romanticism rendered Menius untouchable. His North Carolina upbringing, his accompanying Southern drawl and easy-going manner, and his close affiliation with a

regionally based "traditional" genre, made him seem like the personification of the folk. If Hirsch was a fast-talking outsider whose blasphemy would sell out the music, Menius was roots incarnate, who could never desire anything but preservation of the traditional sounds that were his birthright. Balderose summed it up:

> Art embodied a love of traditional music and that kind of really came through. It's like he was born in the holler and he's never left, but he's intelligent and he can bring that kind of cultural background to intelligent discussions, very intelligent discussions about organization, and that impressed a lot of people, because he had his foot in both camps. He was a good organizer, but he was apparently a traditionalist as well, and he could recite chapter and verse of every bluegrass performer that ever lived. So he was really interested in history and personalities and the things that traditionalists are interested in, rather than people who are interested in the commercial singer-songwriting.[51]

Throughout 1989 the steering committee accomplished much of its work via telephone and at two weekend meetings held in April and October at the Philadelphia home of Tankle and Cohen.[52] Utilizing a subcommittee structure, the group addressed membership categories, voting rights and programs. Moss suggested the word "Alliance." He and Cohen, working privately throughout the year, hammered out a set of proposed by-laws. These contained an ambitious, sometimes muddled mission statement that mixed long-standing scholarly constructs with modern theoretical refinements and pragmatic commercial considerations. They began by declaring that the Alliance existed "to foster and promote traditional, contemporary and multicultural folk music, dance and related performing arts in the U.S. and Canada." Positing "traditional" and "contemporary" as distinct categories, the by-laws appeared to confine tradition to the past, divorced from all present-day artistic expression. The second sentence, however, acknowledged that "living cultural expressions and traditions are shared through folk

music and dance, heightening understanding of all cultures . . . " Read in conjunction, these two sentences honored tradition's ongoing role while accepting the existence of a folk music apart from the purely traditional. The reference to multiculturalism was, arguably, a redundancy, since the culturally neutral terms "traditional" and "contemporary" could encompass a wide range of vernacular music. Still, given the revival's historical emphasis on Anglo-American forms and the blues it was a political necessity, particularly for an organization that claimed a continental reach. Overall it was a statement suited to the revival, blending old and new academic constructs with the commercial realities inherent in marketing "folk" as a music industry genre.[53]

Three early decisions had an enormous impact on the organization's eventual structure. The first was the decision to leave the word "folk" undefined. The Weissmans advocated this and the organizers agreed fairly quickly. Coming from the IBMA, which does not define the arguably narrower term "bluegrass," Menius was convinced that any attempt at definition would cripple the fledgling group. "Understand," he maintains, "that we're dealing with a community so fractious that a split exists between folks who like archaic commercial music versus those who only like back porch archaic music versus those interested only in contemporary performers of the same styles. Any definition at all destroys any chance of success for the organization."[54] The second significant decision was that which structured the planned annual gathering as a commercial trade show. Menius advocated this and it reflects his strong belief that commerce can help preserve traditional culture. He never thought about the work of the Alliance in terms of genre, history or musical function. Instead he saw things "in marketing terms. I think of music," he says, "released on certain labels, handled by particular distributors and agents,

presented in certain venues, covered by particular media."[55] The third significant decision was that which allowed individuals to become voting members. The Weissmans had envisioned the Alliance as an "organization of organizations"—an approach with some early supporters, Moss in particular. Most committee members, however, feared that approach would promote an exclusivity that contradicted the revival's egalitarian ethos. In the end, the committee extended voting rights not only to organizations but to any individual "presently professionally active in the field of folk music, dance, and the related performing arts . . ." Defined explicitly to include "performers," this opened membership to the countless ambitious singers and musicians who later flocked to the annual conference in the hope of personal career advancement.[56] These decisions collectively helped create an organization open not only to committed cultural advocates but to anyone—performer, agent or record mogul—who sensed commercial advantage in defining themselves or their product as folk, at least for the few days per year that the Alliance met in conference.

Almost immediately, a divide opened between members. On one side stood self-described traditionalists who favored a folk music that retained at least some identity as the unique cultural product of indigenous groups. On the other stood the singer-songwriters, who some disdain as pop performers using folk venues as a commercial way station as they struggle for success. Despite the historical linkage between the great boom and the contemporary acoustic writer/performer, the number of singer-songwriters drawn immediately to the fledgling Alliance caught some organizers off guard. Notwithstanding the egalitarian decision to admit individuals, the largely tradition-minded, organizationally based activists present in Malibu assumed that the goal of the new

association was to help them better achieve their organizational ends. Romalis envisioned, in part, a forum at which academic folklorists would consult with revivalists about the most sensitive way to foster the nexus between traditional art and commerce—a nexus that she accepted provided that all concerned respected the values of heritage and community. Serving on a subcommittee charged with finding talent to perform at the second and third annual conferences, she received a rude awakening when she saw how quickly performer submissions started to come through conventional business channels. Hoping for an organization "that didn't constantly sell, sell, sell," she did not anticipate the "wonderful resumes or publicity packets" submitted by ambitious entertainment professionals who unexpectedly, to her, identified the Alliance as a suitable locale for self-promotion. "I know that all of this [promotional material] is terribly necessary if you want to sell yourself but it just seemed like a pop orientation." Soon, Romalis realized that the organization was attracting many people who saw it as a device through which they might—and she adopts a loud, carnival barker's voice here—"bring back the folk boom." With different personal goals, she left the organization after a few years.[57]

Ulven also served on the showcase committee during the Alliance's first few years. He, too, was surprised at the speed with which professionally aggressive singer-songwriters embraced the organization as one more commercial opportunity. He recalls roughly 60 applications for 18 performing slots at the second conference, with the majority coming from singer-songwriters. He reviewed close to 300 submissions for the fourth conference and the percentage of contemporary songwriters among them had increased. The sheer quantity of material made the need to wade through bad writing inevitable. Ulven found many of the lyrics so personal, so inner-directed, that he could

not imagine them interesting anyone but the writer. He tired quickly of songwriters "complaining, 'God, how could she have left me,' and I was thinking, 'God, how could she have taken you in the first place.'" With a traditionalist's interest in material that endures, he asked himself, "If I come back in 50 years, is anybody going to be singing [these songs]?"[58]

Ulven's concern is a common one. Writing in the Alliance newsletter in 1993, performer Mike Agranoff bemoaned the prevalence of "me" songs within the folk scene, to the exclusion of more inclusive "us" songs. Randy Pitts, who booked a multitude of guitar strumming troubadours when he was creative director of Berkeley's Freight and Salvage in the 1990s, jokes that, in contrast to the many writers of the sixties who focused on "songs of political action," contemporary writers too often favor "songs of personal indulgence." Anguish over "me" songs has grown so prevalent that it has provoked satirical comment in the form of "Those Festivals," a song written by Peter Siegel, a Massachusetts-based, politically-conscious performer.

> In modern folk the singer is the center of the song
> The topics range from love to. . . well the list ain't very long
> I'm not so sure what the appeal of modern folk may be
> Perhaps it's that most people like predictability
> There's a song about lost love and a song about love's pain
> A song about a lover with the metaphor of rain
> There's a song about love with the metaphor of trains
> There's a song about love that waxed and love that has since waned
> There is nothing wrong with love songs—we all can relate
> We all have had a little love, there's simply no debate
> I just wish that in modern songs the emphasis would be
> On the interest of everyone, the 'we' and not the 'me.'[59]

Those interested in folksong as a window into vernacular communities, a means of fostering fellowship or a tool for social activism, tend to dismiss all "me-songs" as the

product of "navel gazers singing their diaries," a phrase heard often in discussion at Alliance conferences. The contempt directed toward such material is evident in a review of Night in a Strange Town, a 1998 album by Canadian songwriter Lynn Miles on Rounder's Philo imprint. Calling the work a "crushingly banal vanity production," the reviewer knows his readership well enough that he is content to illustrate his point primarily by excerpting just a few lines from one fairly typical song: "I drew a map of my heart/I painted it melancholy blue/and the biggest room is empty/and it's waiting for you." Satisfied that this brief fragment proves his point, the reviewer follows it with only one word: "Cut!" He makes no mention of Miles' gorgeous voice or the quality of the musicianship. These are apparently not even relevant to a critical aesthetic that elevates lyrical subject matter above all else. With her overriding focus on the personal torment of heartbreak, Miles apparently falls far short of this reviewer's idea of an acceptable folk album and it is a "failure" sufficient to allow him to dismiss her CD in its entirety.[60]

Menius says that he and at least some other Alliance founders anticipated singer-songwriter involvement but adds that "we honestly expected only more rooted singer-songwriters" to participate. Here, he touches upon terrain as ambiguous as the concept of the "folk" itself. Revivalists tend to call a song "rooted" if it appears tied in some fashion to the historical construct of folksong as understood by either academic folklorists or an earlier generation of folk music activists. In practice, this means tunes that use stylistic elements derived from discernible vernacular traditions, lyrics that describe the lives or histories of a people, or songs that serve political ends. Like the related construct of authenticity, rootedness lies along a continuum, allowing singer-songwriters of varying

circumstances to earn the coveted status even if they lack the more obvious markers of vernacularity derived from race, ethnicity or regionalism.

Jody Stecher, a New York-born, great boom-bred multi-instrumentalist who performs old-time country music as well as newer compositions written in an old-time vein, has thought a great deal about the role of contemporary composition within the world of folk music. Supportive of new music in any genre, Stecher has no objection to singer-songwriters. Nonetheless, he sees a problem with many contemporary writers that goes beyond lyrical triteness. The "divide" between traditionalists and "your average troubadour," he says, stems from the fact that so many of the latter have "not heard the old music." Thus divorced from musical history, they lack knowledge of an essential stylistic vocabulary that could lend texture and variety to their songs. Moreover, they have not taken the opportunity to analyze those features that have produced tunes or lyrics that have stood the test of time. Instead, many listen almost exclusively to the music of their contemporaries, resulting in a plethora of unimaginative music that tends to sound the same, ensuring that little of it will grab the public's imagination for the long term. Those who have made the effort to absorb older material have, in Stecher's opinion, merely done the rudimentary homework essential to the songwriter's craft, resulting in work that is "stronger and more powerful than something that comes out of individual imagination." While contemporary writers are often "clever and intellectual," Stecher says, their work "doesn't stir anything in me that's primal, that's deep, that has to do with my general humanity as opposed to this person's specifics."[61]

Sandy and Caroline Paton admire new songs that reflect the "values" of traditional song. Wading into ambiguity's murky waters, Sandy explains that one finds such values

in songs that reflect the "attitudes and concerns of community, rather than individuals." It's the "sort of thing you find in labor songs," he adds. It's the sort of thing you find even in songs of "courting and complaint," provided that they address broadly universal themes. Drawn to songs that serve as vehicles of communal expression and fellowship, each favors those suitable for group singing. Sandy refers to this quality as "the accessibility of a song," which he finds in "choruses that people can join in on and share the song that way." Caroline, who acknowledges that all of this is hugely subjective, adds that one often hears these varied qualities in lullabies, which she considers almost perfect examples of folk or folk-like songs. In addition to being straightforward in message, simple in language, easy to sing, and usually non-commercial in sound, they serve a universal function, one that is useful to every human who has ever cradled a small child.[62]

The ideals of Stecher and the Patons are largely embodied in the work of Gordon Bok, a contemporary songwriter well-versed in the "old songs," who listens widely and performs a great many songs written by others in addition to his own tunes. Bok chased stardom fleetingly in the sixties, when Noel Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary produced his first album for Verve Records, an MGM subsidiary. Later, he settled into a quieter recording and performing career. Alone or in collaboration he has recorded roughly 20 albums for the Patons' Folk-Legacy Records. Like Lynn Miles, Bok has written songs that address purely personal feelings. As a lifelong sailor and sometime commercial captain, he has also recorded many self-composed songs about the sea and the seafaring people he has known and worked with on the waters off his native Maine. Disdainful of stereotypically boisterous sea chanteys, which he calls "Yo-Ho-Ho Songs,"

Bok has crafted finely detailed lyrical portraits of a distinctive world filled with flesh and blood men and women with joys and concerns that are a mixture of the universal and the unique, the concrete and the mythical. In "The Ways Of Man" he sings of the hardship and perils of a fisherman's life and of regional cycles that repeat, year after year. "But the days grow short and the year gets old, And the fish won't stay where the water's cold, And if they're going to fill the hold, They've got to go offshore to find them." In "Hills Of Isle La Haut" he tells of one place, "away and to the westward," which offers respite from those same hardships—a place "where the fishing's always easy, they've got no ice or snow." Bok's quiet, richly descriptive songs, steeped in traditional elements, will never top a contemporary hit parade but, like the cowboy songs sought by Lomax at the dawn of the twentieth century, they constitute a regional literature illuminating a relatively hidden corner of American life. Unlike Lomax, who compiled his collection from others, Bok draws his details from his own world, making him a virtually perfect exemplar of a living folk artist, albeit one who is comfortable in the recording studio and on a concert stage. [63]

Offering his own example of a "rooted" singer-songwriter, Menius mentions Tish Hinojosa, a San Antonio-born Mexican-American, raised by Spanish speaking immigrants as the youngest of thirteen children.[64] Unlike Bok, Hinojosa is an ambitious commercial artist whose up and down career includes albums on major labels A&M Records and Warner Communications, as well as several releases on Rounder. She, too, has written her share of songs focused on love and loss, but those interested in roots music tend to exalt that part of her work that draws explicitly from her ethnic or geographic heritage. Her 1992 Rounder release Culture Swing presents her deliberately

as a representative of two overlapping cultures. Embellished with Aztec imagery, the liner notes begin with a quote from Americo Paredes, a scholar of indigenous Texas-Mexican border ballads, who writes that Hinojosa's "art is deeply rooted in the traditions of our ancestors. In her songs," he continues, "the spirit of our people is given voice." With her strummed guitar and wide-open, bell-like voice, Hinojosa seems an inheritor of the Baez/Collins/Mitchell folk revival aesthetic. Yet her production is flavored by elements of conjunto, country music and Texas swing. Her lyrics, sung in a mixture of English and Spanish, are miniaturist evocations of immigrant life along the border. The album opener, "By the Rio Grande," talks of the river's symbolic hold on the lives of those whose cultural influences stem from each of its banks. "Something in the Rain" tells the story of migrant farmworkers, felled by backbreaking work and the pesticides they are forced to breathe as part of their daily struggle to earn a living. "In the Real West" is a southwestern flavored dance tune celebrating the simplicity of "a clean white shirt on a Saturday night, and a long cold beer that's pure delight."[65]

Hinojosa's various records shift between those that emphasized her cultural roots and those that, musically and lyrically, adopt a more universal pop song aesthetic. Notwithstanding these shifts, she appears able to maintain a core audience that appreciates her more indigenous sounding work. In keeping with the flexible nature of rootedness, many fervent admirers of musical traditions are forgiving of purely pop aspirations, provided that a performer returns to the roots with reasonable regularity. White revivalists tend to be conscious of the politics of culture, making them hesitant to ghettoize an indigenous performer by insisting on absolute purity at the expense of the opportunity to reap financial rewards available to others. Much like Louisianans D.L.

Menard and Steve Riley, Hinojosa is a genuine born-and-bred exemplar of the cultural hybridity reflected in her diverse musical streams. As such, she possesses a personal authenticity that affords her considerable leeway. In that context, an overt pop composition, or an entire pop album, are only small aspects of a broader persona that, in Hinojosa's case, encompasses demonstrable respect for both her lived heritage and the concept of community. This allows roots-oriented revivalists to embrace her as a fully realized individual, anchored in her own heritage, yet part of the larger world. It allows them to accept the reality of the commercial culture within which admired artists work, while continuing to revere the idealized folk cultures that shape their own passion.

One clear beneficiary of the broad flexibility accorded the concept of "rooted" is Nanci Griffith, a child of the white middle class, raised by politically liberal parents who loved The Weavers and other sounds of the great boom. After two self-released albums, Griffith signed with Rounder's Philo imprint and has also recorded for several major labels in a commercial career that has waxed and waned. She opened her first Rounder release with "Ghost in the Music," a haunting lament celebrating the unfairly forgotten Native Americans and immigrants who helped build the United States. "Year Down in New Orleans" is a remembrance of lost love, but it carries its story through a finely detailed sense of place. With references to "clover in the fields south of New Orleans" and "fields of summer cane," Griffith reminds listeners of a regional distinctiveness too often forgotten along forgettable highways. Her 1993 release, Other Voices, Other Rooms, is an unabashed celebration of her personal roots within the folk revival itself, covering songs made famous by icons such as Guthrie and Dylan, and those influenced directly by the boom, such as John Prine and Janis Ian. To some critics, Griffith is simply

one more pop-oriented, commercially ambitious singer-songwriter who has helped bastardize the idea of the folk. She lacks Bok's real-life immersion in a distinctive regional and occupational culture and Hinojosa's ability to draw upon a lived ethnic heritage. However, she reveres the revival openly, understands its values and acknowledges her musical influences proudly. Over the course of approximately 15 albums that have encompassed blatant pop sentimentality and even light rock, she has hit the revival touchstones of old-time instrumentation, finely detailed storytelling and political awareness often enough to retain an enormous measure of folk world credibility.[66]

Notwithstanding the ever-increasing number of contemporary songwriters seeking to showcase, the Alliance has striven to ensure that traditional or at least vernacular music is well-represented. As the number of showcase applications from singer-songwriters has continued to grow, selection committees have awarded a disproportionate number of official performance slots to those on the more traditional side of the spectrum.[67] Nonetheless, the rise of the unofficial—or guerilla—showcase has altered the balance. Beginning with the inaugural Alliance meeting in Malibu, attendees have performed informally and spontaneously throughout the conference common areas. In Calgary in 1992, Dirty Linen magazine hosted a hospitality suite with featured performers, an early instance of organized entertainment outside the formal program. At Tucson in 1993 Celtic music promoter Laurie Devine took this one step further, by advertising a specific unofficial performance presented, on the conference premises, by the Scottish band Wolfstone. This unabashed, organized attempt to attain commercial attention distressed conference organizers. Other artists, however, were eager to follow

Wolfstone's lead. The Alliance board succumbed, wedded to an ideal of egalitarianism. As the 1994 Boston conference approached, many performers and agents not only planned unofficial showcases well in advance but also promoted them with paid advertising in the conference program. Others simply relied on handbills posted or distributed at the conference itself. With the Alliance reputation growing, and a conference located in the populous and accessible urban northeast, attendance doubled that of Tucson and there seemed to be unofficial showcases throughout the hotel, day and night. Singer-songwriters crooning their "me" songs of love and loss were seemingly everywhere.

Boston was the source of a now legendary, as yet unduplicated singer-songwriter success story, which fueled hope that a few days at the conference might jump-start a successful career. In February 1994 Dar Williams was a 26-year-old Wesleyan graduate then living in Northampton, Massachusetts. A clever, literate, though still developing songwriter with a gorgeous soprano, Williams had spent years playing at unknown coffeehouses and informal "open mike" nights, where she sold her self-financed, self-released debut album, a collection of songs that seemingly chronicled every aspect of her personal development. That album garnered some favorable attention on the coffeehouse circuit, prompting a small but tangible "buzz" that suggested—to those who pay attention to such things—the presence of a talent worth examining. At the Boston conference, Williams gave three unofficial showcase performances that transformed her life in a manner that seems miraculous. "I remember going to the Folk Alliance in '94 and coming home a completely different person. Everything was different. I was offered management, record label, and booking in one sitting, basically."[68] That summer, she

performed at the reborn Newport Folk Festival, now a relatively star-studded affair with corporate sponsorship. In 1995 she toured as the opening act for Joan Baez and was profiled in Billboard. By the end of the decade Williams employed a backing band, had earned a spot on the much publicized Lilith Fair and her three solo albums had collectively sold over 300,000 copies, a stratospheric total for even the most established folk artists.[69]

The Boston conference prompted considerable debate about the Alliance's nature and purpose. Menius recalls Boston as the place where the "singer-songwriter hell issue" became apparent. Blevin saw an "air of hostility and competitiveness" that marred the gathering, with people "aggressively looking for gigs, aggressively looking for agents, not attending workshops at all and being there only to showcase, and that was something that just kind of snowballed." Boston, she concluded, "was hard."[70] Sing Out! columnist Ian Robb wondered if the Alliance was forgetting the many non-profit folk clubs whose aims were "cultural and social, not financial."[71] Moss expressed dismay over "self-promotion run amok." Though acknowledging that business development had a legitimate place within the folk world, he urged all concerned to honor other values as well:

> . . . we need to find a way to prevent the music from being swallowed whole by a lack of focus, clarity, were and real understanding about the genre. I believe that the Alliance needs to redouble its efforts to truly represent the full spectrum of its purported constituency, giving equal weight to the traditional music, academia, and participative folk music programs, along with a measured level of service for the myriad of contemporary singer songwriters who singularly want to sell their services.[72]

Addressing these concerns, Alliance board president Phyllis Barney—soon to become the association's executive director—insisted that the organization was committed to "nothing less than a cultural revolution to convince people that folk music and dance is a valuable cultural resource to be respected and celebrated." She rejected any suggestion that folk music had to become "monochromatic pabulum in order to succeed" and she affirmed the Alliance's dedication to a "broad community," as opposed to a "limited few." She noted the wide array of vernacular music available in Boston, the many workshops offering varied types of technical assistance, the opportunities to network with those advancing widely disparate cultural, social or business agendas, and the many chances to "dance, jam and listen." Calling the conference a "kaleidoscopic view of the community," she reminded critics that it was never intended as the sole event that any folk activist attended in a given year. Instead, it was the one place where diverse agendas came together. She challenged all who loved folk music to involve themselves in "shaping the initiatives of the organization for the coming years."[73]

After the Boston conference Alliance members have struggled to reconcile seemingly contradictory agendas. For many participants, a growing number of unofficial showcases have become the association's reason for being. What began as an effort to draw together organizationally affiliated traditional music lovers, dedicated to finding better ways to advance vernacular culture and community music making, has become, to a considerable degree, a mass audition for contemporary performers seeking commercial opportunity. Contemporary singer-songwriters vastly outnumber tradition-bearers and the troubadours fill hotel suites into the early morning hours, sometimes with only a handful of people listening. It is common to see a solitary performer, guitar case in hand, hustling

down a corridor, off to their next showcase. Amidst much good music, there is a great deal of terrible music. Confronted all at once by large numbers of acoustic guitar playing singers, it is easy to understand the oft-heard complaint that so many of them sound alike and offer poetry of no particular distinction.

Some presenters, agents, record company representatives and disc jockeys make careful plans to see specific musicians, and each year people ask one another to identify particularly compelling, yet unknown, performers. Musicians discuss whether or not a costly trip to the conference has resulted in tangible career benefits, which many judge by whether they have secured a record contract, an agent or even a single gig. Those with high expectations are often disappointed. Benefits, even where they exist, are not always evident. A disc jockey might see an act in a showcase, begin to air the performer's music, thus exposing it to a promoter who hears it months after the conference, who may then wait additional months before calling the performer to discuss the possibility of a future performance. The lure of some benefit keeps the showcase rooms filled, as new musicians arrive every year, replacing those who have elected not to come. Notwithstanding Barney's commitment to revolution, some founders have grown disillusioned with the "me" songs, the self-promotion and the buying and selling. In addition to Romalis, Ulven stopped coming, unable to see how the cost of attendance benefited his Fox Valley Folklore Society. After the 1996 Washington, DC conference, the Patons stopped attending as well.

During his period of active service to the Alliance, which progressed from steering committee member to the organization's first paid "manager," Menius spent much of his time trying to buttress tradition. He blames much of the divisiveness on

fellow traditionalists who, he maintains, were always too ready to "take their balls and bats (or banjos and mandolins) home."[74] At the 1999 conference in Albuquerque, this separatist tendency sparked a discussion that might have altered the nature of the Alliance permanently. Roughly two dozen people out of 1590 registrants attended a meeting of the Traditional Music Peer Group, a scheduled gathering open to any conference attendee who wanted to discuss traditional artistry. Moderator Jeff Davis noted that many who were interested in tradition had grown increasingly "frustrated" with their place in the organization, a remark that sparked an outpouring of grievances. One participant suggested that the songwriters' ubiquitous presence was one reason that academic folklorists did not participate in the organization. Acting at Barney's request, former board member Charlie Pilzer sought opinions about the possibility of a separately scheduled "mini-conference," dedicated to the preservation and promotion of tradition. After an exploration of this idea, with frustrations vented and alternatives explored, sentiment within this small group turned away from separatism. There were already too many demands on the time and money of devotees and no one needed another event to attend. Mark Moss took a typically forceful stand that seemed to move the group decisively away from the idea. Rather than leave, he argued, traditionalists should hold their heads up, raise their own profile and pursue their goals within the existing framework.[75]

The prospect of separation seems to have awakened traditionalists to the reality that Barney had noted after stark divisions mushroomed in Boston. Judging solely by raw numbers, singer-songwriters appeared to dominate all aspects of the conference. However, many of them did not participate in the formal proceedings. More importantly,

the Alliance has always offered traditionalists ample opportunity to pursue their interests. The 1999 Albuquerque attendees who debated the possibility of an alternative conference could also attend workshops on Nordic, Hispanic or Native American music, to cite just a few examples of the vernacular forms presented. They could partake of sessions that discussed techniques useful in recording non-professional traditional musicians or offered advice on how to best present traditional music within the context of a large festival. They could discuss problems inherent in doing fieldwork among the traditional musicians of Mexico, in a session focusing on interaction with Mexican cultural institutions. They could have learned something about the history of the banjo, enjoyed an oral history session with New Mexican accordionist Antonia Apodoca, seen a performance by traditional Zuni dancers, or listened to uilleann pipes, Kolamashie music from the Ghanaian coast and Acadian music as still performed on Prince Edward Island. Still other activities were of interest to a broad range of attendees, whether traditionalists or not. Organizational representatives could attend sessions on board development or fundraising; promoters of all stripes could gather to discuss concert production; and performers—whether contemporary songwriters or banjo picking preservationists—could obtain tips on stagecraft or staying healthy while on the road.[76]

It is difficult to gauge the "sense" of a widespread community of interest based on an annual conference now attended regularly by close to 1800 people. Nonetheless, over the dozen years through 2004 that I have attended eight Folk Alliance conferences, I believe the mood has settled into one of acceptance, accommodation and collaboration among groups with disparate musical and cultural interests. Today, traditionalists seem quick to spurn anything that suggests the creation of a "trad ghetto," such as the proposal

that the Alliance issue special conference badges for self-described traditionalists. Now when traditionalists gather, their discussions often focus on programming strategies appropriate to a commercial world in which vernacular music often struggles to find a large audience. Many musicians resist suggestions that they alter their musical style—a position that virtually all attendees seem to respect—but there is explicit acknowledgment of the fact that when music moves from the porch to the stage, musicians need to present it professionally. One hears much excited talk about the promise of mixed performances, in which traditional and vernacular musicians share stages with more accessible singer-songwriters, country performers and even rock bands.

People on all sides of the folk world's debates appear willing to acknowledge that, in artistic terms, they can gain something from the conference. Blevin, who found the Boston meeting so disheartening, took stock of what the Alliance offered and hung on. She is always able to find a workshop or performance meaningful to her. She is convinced that the annual gathering has helped people to better accept one another, opening everyone's ears to music they can enjoy, notwithstanding its position along the folk continuum. An avowed traditionalist, she applauds the desire to preserve older styles but she does want her fellow traditionalists to enjoy a bit of diversity. She recalls participants in old-time jams who formerly would groan if someone sat in with an instrument that was wildly out of context, such as a conga or an African djembe. Now she sees a greater willingness to go along and enjoy the moment. She sees singer-songwriters also opening their ears, listening to exciting old-time revivalists like Dirk Powell or Bruce Molsky and realizing, often for the first time, that this music is more than something "old and in the way."[77]

Performer and Alliance stalwart John McCutcheon also sees the conference reconciling fault lines within the revival, providing a setting where people can "enter into important discussions about the direction of the community and grapple with the issues." "Where else is it going to happen?" he asks. As a writer, McCutcheon's themes often center explicitly on the political or the idea of community. In recent years he has served as President of Local 1000 of the American Federation of Musicians, an affiliate established specifically to address the needs of touring musicians in the folk and acoustic music world. As a union officer he concedes that it would be impolitic of him to pick sides in folk's sectarian wars but he is convincing in his call for respect for all artists struggling to create any form of non-commercial expression.

> I don't think there has to be sides. There will always be people who don't like [your songs]. There will be people who don't like your voice or your instrumental skills or whatever. There will be people who'll say 'Oh, why don't you go back to playing traditional songs' . . . I hope they'll all succeed and I hope that somebody who's writing their diary can pay their bills, have kids, pay their rent, eat well and take a vacation. And I hope, at the same time, there are twenty new bluegrass bands that can make a living next year. There's a lot of room . . . There's a tremendous need for poets in these non-poetic times and if you can open somebody up to what music has always done, by touching them in a place that only a 22-year-old—'I just broke up with my boyfriend and I don't know what to do'—writer can do, God bless 'em.[78]

Beyond serving as a living laboratory in which varied musical styles and cultural theories are mixed, examined and tested, the Alliance seeks to advance the interests of its members in more tangible ways. The group's mission statement articulates several broad organizational goals. Through public education the association hopes to increase awareness of the variety and continuing relevance of folk music. Through advocacy it hopes to influence "decision makers and resource providers" in an effort to insure "the

growth of folk music and dance." In the areas of "field" and "professional" development it strives to strengthen both grass-roots folk music societies and for-profit folk oriented businesses. Despite these admirable goals, significant financial limitations and a small staff have prevented the Alliance from achieving much outside the scope of its annual conferences. It has established a program that simplifies members' efforts to obtain non-profit status. It has lent its name and some assistance to public events held to illuminate the legacies of such historic revival figures as Phil Ochs, Woody Guthrie and Alan Lomax. In conjunction with other private cultural groups and the National Endowment for the Arts it has urged continued funding of the American Folklife Center and it has participated in negotiations with the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security regarding the visa problems of foreign artists who wish to perform in the United States. In none of these efforts did the Alliance play a leading role. It has negotiated—thus far unsuccessfully—with BMI and ASCAP to secure more equitable treatment of both venues and composers with respect to the collection and distribution of licensing fees that compensate songwriters for the commercial performance of their copyrighted works.[79]

At the conferences, the Alliance makes a genuine effort to help members meet their ongoing needs through a wide range of workshops on such nuts and bolts topics as grant writing, desktop publishing, effective publicity and festival organization, to name just a few. The quality of these sessions varies, depending largely upon the skill of the volunteer presenter. They undoubtedly benefit some, though their overall impact is hard to determine. The booking agent training course, begun in 2002 and continued annually, seeks to add to the ranks of qualified agents—an attempt to satisfy the demands of the many emerging artists who cannot find competent representation despite, in some cases,

genuine talent. It is a long-range effort and its success remains undetermined but it is a well-meaning attempt by the Alliance to satisfy a structural need within the industry it serves. The conference has its critics. Some complain about the absence of those small folk music societies that need neither marketing plans nor record deals. Little-known performers are beginning to realize that a costly trip to the conference's madhouse setting can hardly spark the careers of a few hundred musicians, all desperate for small cafe or house concert gigs. Better-known performers and established agents bemoan the fact that many large concert presenters do not attend, since they usually have more efficient means to learn about an act and analyze its suitability for their venue. Organizational representatives note that many helpful workshops are repeated from year to year, offering new insights only sporadically. Among many members, there is a rising belief that the Alliance needs some success apart from the conference itself—a success that provides tangible benefit to its industry constituency. As the Alliance matures, it remains to be seen whether ongoing debate about its purpose and efficacy will prompt its demise or spur it to greater achievement.

Despite criticism, the yearly international conferences held since Boston have drawn between 1400 and 1800 registrants. Many believe that the Alliance is an overwhelming success merely because of the opportunity it affords members to gather together on a regular basis. In addition to the international conferences that I have focused on here, the Alliance also sponsors an annual series of regional conferences that now number four. These offer a calmer, less crowded environment than that offered by the larger meeting. As a member of the steering committee, Art Menius lent his support to all of the organization's formal goals but what mattered to him most was the

opportunity to foster communication across the breadth of the folk music community. "I was driven," he says, "by trying to bring people and organizations together to work for the commonweal." Commenting on the regular opportunity to meet with colleagues, Blevin says, “How much more effective could you be than that. That is a primary thing—to take people out of their little isolated location and their single-minded activity and show them what other people are doing and open up a window on new possibilities. I never come away from there without a notebook full of contacts, ideas, grant ideas, [and] breakthroughs. . ." If there were no Folk Alliance, she says, "You'd have to spend your whole year going around visiting organizations and going to festivals and getting nothing else done. And here you can get so much of that done in one weekend. It's enormously valuable for me."[80]

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[1] Bob Woodcock, "Letters/ Regional Organization," Sing Out!, Vol.26, No. 3 (1977), 53.

[2] Mimi Bluestone, "What’s Happening/Pay The Fiddler," 28 Sing Out!, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1980), 34, 36.

[3] Richard Carlin, "Folk Forum: Folk Musicians, Folk Clubs, and Dollars," Sing Out!, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1977), 34.

[4] Mimi Bluestone, "What’s Happening/ Report From The Rendezvous: Hey Rube!" Sing Out!, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1980), 40, 41-42. See also, Mimi Bluestone, "What’s Happening/ Rendezvous 1980: Paying The Fiddler," Sing Out!, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1980), 40, 42; Michael Cooney, "Roads Scholar," Sing Out!, Oct-Nov-Dec 1984, 59, 60-61.

[5] Michael Cooney, "Roads Scholar," Sing Out!, Apr-May-June 1985, 43, 45; Michael Cooney, "Roads Scholar," Sing Out!, Oct/Nov/Dec 1985, 53; Michael Cooney, "Roads Scholar, "Sing Out!, Fall 1986, 63.

[6] Scott Alarik, "Stephen Baird & The Folk Arts Network," Sing Out!, Summer 1990, 10, 13.

[7] Ibid., 15.

[8] Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College, 2000 Catalog, passim.

[9] Margo Blevin, interview by author.

[10] Sonny Thomas, interview by author.

[11] "Important Announcement," Sing Out!, Summer 1988, 86. Margo Blevin, in a letter to the author dated 10 January 2005, recalls that Weissman placed similar notices in the Old Time Herald. Blevin saw this as an "important" attempt to reach beyond a "fairly narrow focus of urban coffeehouses and singer/songwriters" and embrace "traditional musicians, who had fewer avenues at that time, and non-musicians such as folklorists and music scholars." While Sing Out! does cover the old-time music scene, it also covers much more and Blevin sees a clear distinction between the magazines' readers.

[12] Clark Weissman, addressing the General Session of the International Conference of the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance, Boston, Massachusetts, 18 February 1994. Tape recording in possession of author, prepared by Chesapeake Audio/Video Communications, Inc. (Elkridge, MD), in cooperation with the Folk Alliance.

[13] Anne Blaine, interview by author.

[14] Shelly Romalis, interview by author.

[15] Blevin, interview by author.

[16] Sandy and Caroline Paton, interview by author.

[17] "Proceedings of Folk Alliance Meeting #1," Malibu, California 19-22 January 1989, provided to author by Folk Alliance executive director Phyllis Barney, passim.

[18] Blevin, interview by author.

[19] Blevin, letter to author, 10 January 2005.

[20] Thomas, interview by author; Blevin, letter, 10 January 2005; George Balderose, interview by author; Romalis, interview by author.

[21] Blaine, interview by author; Thomas, interview by author.

[22] Juel Ulven, interview by author.

[23] Romalis, interview by author.

[24] Jim Hirsch, interview by author.

[25] Ulven, interview by author.

[26] Thomas, interview by author.

[27] Blaine, interview by author; Dianne Tankle, interview by author.

[28] Hirsch, interview by author.

[29] Ulven, interview by author.

[30] "Proceedings," 10-11.

[31] Thomas, interview by author.

[32] Ulven, interview by author.

[33] Scott Alarik, "The Continuing Tradition of Folk-Legacy Records," Sing Out!, Spring 1991, 26, 28; for more on the Patons, see Andrew H. Malcolm, "A Love For Songs Of Folks," New York Times, national ed., 29 November 1992, A13.

[34] Alarik, "The Continuing Tradition," 28.

[35] Ibid., passim.

[36] Dianne Tankle and Robert Cohen, interview by author.

[37] "Sing Out! Survival Threatened," Sing Out!, Vol. 28, No. 4, inside front cover.

[38] Mark Moss, "Friends Of Sing Out!," Sing Out!, Vol. 28, No. 5, 31.

[39] "And Lots Of Thanks. . ." Sing Out!, Vol. 28, No. 5: Inside front cover.

[40] Sing Out!, (Apr./May/Jun. 1983) was the first issue that designated Moss as editor.

[41] Lisa Grayson, Biography of a Hunch: The History of Chicago's Legendary Old Town School of Folk Music (Chicago: private publication by Old Town School of Folk Music, 1992), 7 (Hamilton quote), passim.

[42] Ibid., 32-34.

[43] Ibid., 35-39; Ulven, interview by author.

[44] Hirsch, interview by author (the references to "product" and "markets"); Ulven, interview by author (paraphrasing Hirsch, "You guys gotta be professional," and discussing the reaction that Malibu conference-goers' had to Hirsch).

[45] Jack Bernhardt, "Art Menius: Working To Make Bluegrass Grow," Bluegrass Unlimited, November 1987), 54.

[46] Ibid., passim.

[47] Ibid., 55-56.

[48] Mark Fenster, "Commercial (and/or?) Folk: The Bluegrass Industry and Bluegrass Traditions," in Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars and Honky-Tonk Bars, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 74,75.

[49] Art Menius, e-mail to author, 27 December 1999.

[50] Menius, e-mail to author, 14 January 2000.

[51] Balderose, interview by author.

[52] Ulven, interview by author.

[53] Moss, interview by author; undated press release by The North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance, issued after the April 1989 meeting; letter from "The Folk Alliance Steering Committee" to the Malibu conference attendees, dated 30 November 1989, which included a copy of the proposed by-laws (documents in possession of the author).

[54] Menius, e-mail to author, 27 December 1999.

[55] Menius, e-mail to author, 5 January 2000.

[56] The steering committee circulated the proposed by-laws to all Malibu participants via a letter dated November 30, 1989. At the organization's second annual conference, held in Philadelphia from January 25 to 28, 1990, the approximately 200 registrants approved these by-laws by a near unanimous vote. These rules adopted membership categories, still in effect, that grant ten votes to organizations with gross annual revenue in excess of $300,000, five votes to those with gross revenue between $50,000 and $300,000, and three votes to those with revenue under $50,000). Eligible individuals have one vote. The by-laws also create a non-voting "associate" membership, reserved for those who support the organization's goals but are not active in the field.

[57] Romalis, interview by author.

[58] Ulven, interview by author.

[59] Mike Agranoff, "At The Microphone," Folk Alliance Newsletter, Winter 1993, 20. Pitts first made his joke about "songs of personal indulgence" in an informal conversation with the author. I attribute it here with his permission. Peter Siegel, "Those Festivals" (BMI), used by permission.

[60] Mitch Ritter, "Linen Shorts," Dirty Linen, August/September 1999, 83; Lynn Miles, "Map Of My Heart," on the audio recording Lynn Miles, Night In A Strange Town, Philo Records 11671-1215-2.

[61] Jody Stecher, interview by author.

[62] Sandy and Caroline Paton, interview by author.

[63] Scott Alarik, "Solitude vs. Solicitude: The Music of Gordon Bok," Sing Out!, February/March/April 1992, 2, passim; Gordon Bok, "The Ways Of Man;" Gordon Bok, "The Hills Of Isle La Haut."

[64] Menius, e-mail to author, 27 December 1999.

[65] All songs by Tish Hinojosa, appearing on the audio recording Tish Hinojosa, Culture Swing, Rounder Records 3122.

[66] Nanci Griffith, Ghost in the Music; Nanci Griffith, "Year Down in New Orleans." each from the audio recording Once In A Very Blue Moon, Philo Records CD 1096.

[67] Ulven, interview by author; Charlie Pilzer, interview by author.

[68] Philip Van Vleck, "Dar Williams: Travels In Two Worlds," Dirty Linen, June/July 2001, 47, 50.

[69] Irwin Stambler and Lyndon Stambler, Folk and Blues: The Encyclopedia (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), s.v. "Williams, Dar."

[70] Menius, e-mail to author, 27 December 1999; Blevin, interview by author.

[71] Ian Robb, "The British-North America Act," Sing Out!, August/September/October 1994, 50-51.

[72] Mark D. Moss, "The First Words." Sing Out!, August/September/October 1994, 2.

[73] Phyllis Barney, "The Alliance Strikes Back" (letter to the editor) in "The Last Words," Sing Out!, November/December 1994/January 1995, 195.

[74] Menius, e-mail to author, 27 December 1999.

[75] I attended this session and the description and quotations come from my handwritten notes, taken during the meeting.

[76] Program Book: 11th Annual International Folk Alliance Conference (Albuquerque, NM 1999), passim.

[77] Blevin, interview by author.

[78] John McCutcheon, interview by author.

[79] For the Alliance's current mission statement, see <http://www.folkalliance.net/cms/index.php?pid=8>. For the umbrella exemption see <http://folk.org/Services/MS.htm> (each accessed 6 March 2005). Regarding the Ochs, Guthrie and Lomax events see "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore: The Music of Phil Ochs as Social Protest," Folk Alliance Newsletter, March/April 1999, 1; "Woody Guthrie on the Mall This Summer," Folk Alliance Newsletter, May/June 2000, 1; Bob Riesman, "Alan Lomax Remembered, Celebrated at NYC Conference," Folk Alliance Newsletter, May/June 2003, 1. Regarding visa negotiations, see Phyllis Barney, "Advocacy Update," Folk Alliance Newsletter, January/February 2004, 3.

[80] Menius, e-mail to author, 27 December 1999; Blevin, interview by author.

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FOLK MUSIC, WAL-MART AND ROUNDER RECORDS
Traditional Music In Contemporary Markets

Writing in the Washington Post, rock musician Don Henley has declared that the music business is in a state of "crisis." Looking back toward his professional start in the late 1960s, Henley remembers a time when his industry treated music as "important and vital to our culture." Radio stations were "local and diverse" and programmed an "incredible variety of music." Record companies signed and developed "cutting-edge artists." Music stores were "magical places offering wide variety." Today, Henley complains, all is different. The labels, radio stations and record retailers of yore have fallen before the juggernaut of commercial consolidation—merging and growing for the sole purpose of maximizing profit—a goal in which music is not art but merely the commodity of choice. Local radio is becoming a thing of the past as absentee corporate owners substitute centralized programming for community voices. Where there once existed a plethora of big and small record labels, a handful of multi-national corporations now dominate the industry. In much of the nation, mass-merchandisers have replaced the once "magical" record stores. Wal-Mart, Best Buy and Target, which offer recorded music largely to foster the sale of other products, are now the country's primary compact disc retailers. Artists compete for shelf space and the stores charge fees to display posters and engage in other routine promotions, limiting opportunities for unknowns. Overall Henley sketches a world of profit-driven cultural homogenization, which devalues art, those who create it and the very idea of uniqueness.[1]

Henley's fond memory of the music business of his youth may recall an industry that, rather than being art-loving and altruistic, had simply not yet figured out how to maximize revenue. Many people, however, share his image of the industry's present profit-centered state. I discovered his article through a posting on FOLKDJ-L, the electronic discussion list maintained by and for the benefit of folk music disc jockeys. Today, among many revivalists, the consolidation of the media and that of the music industry as a whole provoke fear and disdain akin to that which early folklorists expressed about urbanization and industrialization. As demonstrated during the founding of the Folk Alliance, whether the subject is an international media goliath or one of the larger revival organizations, there exists concern that size compels either the desire or need for the acquisition of large sums of money. This desire then encourages a singular interest in music that appeals to the greatest common denominator as opposed to that which is more idiosyncratic and community-based. Paradoxically, many simultaneously harbor an intense desire to participate in the marketplace, so that folk music can gain a hearing and folk artists or entrepreneurs can earn a living. This tension and the need to locate an acceptable middle ground permeates folk activism.

More than a century ago folklorists feared the literal disappearance of diverse groups and their unique expressive features. Today's avocational and entrepreneurial revivalists fear the disappearance of those outlets—whether they are radio stations, record labels or retailers—that help give voice to diverse musical expression. While the multi-faceted phenomena of media and music industry consolidation are deserving of full-length study, my more limited goal is to illustrate the manner in which they color revivalist discourse. In this regard, a primary concern is the dwindling number of eclectic

local radio stations—those that offer diverse programming and employ announcers who are knowledgeable about community events and concerns. Folk music disc jockeys tend to see their own programs as islands of cultural idiosyncrasy and pluralism amidst airwaves that are otherwise awash in homogenous entertainment. The best program hosts do more than broadcast an eclectic array of hard-to-find music. They also serve as educators, capable of explaining the roots of the music they play and something of the cultures from which it derives. On-air guests often augment such discussions with particular expertise. Even those broadcasters who avoid the vernacular and concentrate instead on contemporary Anglo singer-songwriters assert proudly that their offerings stand apart from the mainstream of mass-mediated culture. For disc jockeys and fans alike, folk radio serves the vital function of nurturing the revival community within a listening area, by interviewing community activists, spotlighting local musicians and venues, and providing notice of nearby performances. These services bring folk fans together, fostering a sense of group identity and purpose on which revivalism thrives.

Changes in both law and radio station economics since the mid-1990s have posed an unprecedented threat to the continued existence of local radio and to the often-unconventional programming it provides. Most dedicated folk shows are broadcast only once a week, generally on the weekends when listenership is low. Of 90 local folk radio shows listed in the Summer 2004 issue of Sing Out!, 65 appeared on the weekend and all but a handful received no more than two to four hours of airtime per week. The disc jockeys who program these shows, many of whom assemble on the internet and at the annual Folk Alliance conference, often sound like the beleaguered inhabitants of a community under siege as they exchange survival strategies centering on station politics

and the incessant need to raise funds. Many direct their frustration at the impact of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which for the first time allowed a single person or entity to own an unlimited number of radio stations nationally and up to eight stations within a single market. The result, according to Columbia University journalism professor Samuel G. Freedman, was an "acquisition frenzy" in which the value of stations rose dramatically and a few conglomerates acquired hundreds of outlets in both large and small markets. With unprecedented investments at stake, owners sought to maximize revenue, minimize costs and eliminate risk. Stations now broadcast more commercials than ever before and often eliminate live announcers. Instead they offer pre-taped shows, allowing room for the periodic insertion of local weather and traffic reports designed to draw listeners and give the illusion of a local presence. Programming strategies have become increasingly risk averse, driven by the need to appeal to the broadest possible audience and the largest number of advertisers.[2]

If there is a popular villain in this media consolidation narrative it is undoubtedly Clear Channel Communications, the Texas corporation that concert promoter Barry Fey has termed "the great Satan of the music business."[3] Founded with a single radio station in 1972, by 2003 Clear Channel owned over 1200 stations nationwide, roughly four times more than its nearest competitor. With many of these stations located in major population centers, Clear Channel then reached over one-third of the U.S. population.[4] The company effectively controls an even larger share of the public airwaves through contractual agreements with other stations, which allow it to oversee operations and programming while garnering a generous share of the resulting revenue.[5] To the chagrin of those who value diverse local radio programming as an element of community building, Clear

Channel is remarkably candid in stating that its emphasis is not programming as such, but the generation of advertising dollars. In the words of company chairman Lowry Mays, "We're simply in the business of selling our customers' products." The company accomplishes this in large part by offering highly popular "all-talk" formats, drawing upon nationally syndicated programs that never touch upon community concerns. Where music is concerned, Clear Channel uses extraordinarily sophisticated research to distill America's musical tastes into programs that are acceptable to the largest number of people, allowing it to ensure advertisers a broad and relatively constant audience. [6]

Clear Channel executives argue that the company's research proves it is merely responding to public demand. They note that far from being homogenous the company offers a variety of music formats, such as classic rock, light rock, oldies and country.[7] Critics counter that the company's approach is a hit driven one. Whatever the format, it always devolves to a heightened focus on those tunes that are least offensive to the broadest number of people. Research by Rolling Stone bears this out, revealing that "Clear Channel's Top Forty stations share more of the same songs today than they did ten years ago, and they play the biggest hits far more often."[8] This strategy drives out anything even remotely unique. The chance that such a tune might cause listeners to twist their dial is simply too great. Bennet Zier, in charge of an eight-station Clear Channel group in the Washington, DC area acknowledges that the company adheres to the "old saying: You don't get hurt by what you don't play."[9] According to media critic Michael Bracey, "You're looking at the disappearance of entire segments of music. It's hard to find bluegrass, traditional country, opera and jazz on the radio. And those are huge segments of cultural heritage that are gone from the airwaves."[10]

To fervent advocates of folk radio, the battle over the commercial airwaves has been lost. Old-time fiddling, zydeco and acoustic singer-songwriters are generally consigned to the left end of the dial, on college and public stations. Folk music is endangered there as well, as music programming of all types competes for airtime with nationally popular shows such as "All Things Considered" and "Car Talk." This trend has been ongoing for years but it gained speed during the 1990s when Congress slashed funding of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). As public stations sought to maximize reliable revenue streams from both underwriters and individual donors, they placed increasing reliance on professional consultants who brought the same message they delivered to commercial radio—idiosyncrasy threatens ratings. By the year 2001, the premier consultant in the world of public radio was David Giovanni, the head of Audience Research Analysis in suburban Washington, DC. Referred to as a "visionary" by Richard Madden, a CPB radio executive, Giovanni has been developing sophisticated listener research tools for over a quarter century. He has concluded that the typical public radio listener wants "news and information" to the exclusion of virtually everything else. If that listener tunes in and hears folk, jazz or opera, Giovanni warns, he or she will turn the dial. If that happens too often, they will never return. He advises clients who wish to maximize their audience to "lose what's on the periphery. Focus on a single audience," he says, "and serve that audience extremely, insanely well, all the time." Asked if it would be a mistake for a station to court two different types of listeners, he responds, "That makes it harder. A radio station should be something for the same person all the time," he insists. "You become less and you become better."[11]

For a folk music community that values vernacular pluralism and artistic diversity, the idea that less is better is both absurd and dangerous. Some members of that community are convinced that the demise of diverse local programming portends dire political consequences. As the Federal Communications Commission considered a further relaxation of media ownership rules in 2003, one FOLKDJ-L correspondent warned, "If you don't want one single company to own all the 'public' airwaves and media sources in the country you're going to need to do something about it fast."[12] Another expressed concern that "our community grass roots life style is going to be threatened by these huge media conglomerates. This whole idea of 'Clear Channel' scares me," he added, "and if you are a lover of free speech and community access it should raise a few red flags in your mind too."[13] Still another reacted with savage satire, posting a faux news item headlined "Clear Channel Acquires FCC." The piece imagines a world in which the media giant bends public policy to its own will, unimpeded by meaningful regulation. It includes a fanciful quotation attributed to Clear Channel chairman Mays, which notes, "The FCC has been a wonderful business partner for the past several years, and has carried out our directions with great enthusiasm."[14] Mark Moss cautioned that without "a diverse, intelligent media, things are going to get a lot worse fast." There is, he added, "an amazing arrogance on the part of those who believe they have the right to take a free and open media away from us." Noting that he had signed anti-consolidation petitions and written to his elected representatives, he concluded, "Maybe I'm tilting at windmills, but I refuse to passively live out George Orwell's vision."[15]

For revivalists needing proof that radio has no interest in traditional American folk music, verification arrived in the medium's response to O Brother Where Art Thou?,

the movie soundtrack that sold in excess of six million copies, an astonishing level for any album in any genre. O Brother stemmed from the minds of brothers Joel and Ethan Coen, filmmakers who had achieved critical acclaim and a measure of commercial success with a series of quirky, intelligent comedies. They enlisted well-known rock producer T-Bone Burnett to assemble a sonic collection of rural southern American folk styles, around which they constructed a comic tale of escaped prisoners on the run in Depression-era Mississippi. Burnett's musical creation blends old-time fiddles with blues and spirituals. It includes current and former Rounder acts Alison Krauss, the Cox Family and Norman Blake. Folk/country favorites Emmy Lou Harris and Gillian Welch also appeared, as did bluesman Chris Thomas King, gospel stalwarts The Fairfield Four and bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley, whose haunting rendition of the anonymous folksong "O Death" serves as an emotional centerpiece to both the album and film. The album's best-known tune became "Man of Constant Sorrow," an ancient song that Stanley and his brother Carter had recorded in 1951, when it was already old. In the film, Hollywood heartthrob George Clooney lip-syncs the song to the voice of Dan Tyminski, a guitarist and vocalist in Krauss's band. After a year of rising sales and favorable press, the album dominated the February 2002 Grammy telecast. The collection as a whole received awards for Album of the Year and Best Compilation Soundtrack. Burnett took home Producer of the Year honors. Grammy voters also recognized Stanley (Best Country Vocal for "O Death") and Tyminski, along with his supporting vocalists and musicians (Best Country Collaboration with Vocals for "Constant Sorrow").

At the time of the album's late-2000 release by Mercury Records, the Universal Music Group—Mercury's parent company—was a Rounder distributor. Mercury was

home to pop-country diva Shania Twain, an all-around entertainer whose success leaned heavily on sexy videos with plenty of costume changes. The label knew how to market Twain's mainstream records but had no expertise with an idiosyncratic roots music grab bag. Recognizing its limitations, the company sought Rounder's assistance in reaching the folk and bluegrass communities with which the smaller label was familiar. Many in those communities considered the Mercury staff nothing but corporate "suits"— stereotypically soulless financiers with no true appreciation of music. Rounder could bridge the divide. It agreed to assume a major role in promoting the record, understanding that a successful soundtrack might provide a boost for Krauss, their best selling artist, as well as for their entire stable of old-time, bluegrass and blues musicians. The Rounder and Mercury staffs organized a pre-release party for the fall 2000 IBMA convention, designed to introduce the project to bluegrass press and radio, as well as to selected retailers, hoping to generate that all-important sense of excitement. Rounder's promotion staff called their roots radio and press contacts, fostering interest, encouraging reviews and articles and offering airplay copies. Ken Irwin discussed the album regularly on BGRASS-L and other listservs. He encouraged fellow list members to spread the word, directed them to relevant items in the press, tracked the record's sales progress with weekly detail, and in general reinforced the impression that its commercial and cultural impact was a meaningful event within the bluegrass and old-time communities, offering recognition, validation and the promise of further, wider success.[16]

Burnett anticipated that mainstream radio would have little interest in O Brother. In a pre-emptive challenge to the medium's conservative impulses—and a clever bit of marketing—the soundtrack's liner notes made a humorous attempt to shame programmers

into playing the record. Those notes include a fictitious Nashville newspaper story dated 1937, headlined "Old-Time Music Is Very Much Alive: But you won't hear it on 'country' radio." The accompanying "article" declares that the album's music is "country," plain and simple, "or at least it was before the infidels of Music Row expropriated that term to describe watered-down pop/rock with greeting-card lyrics." Radio executives, however, did not take the bait. This was hardly surprising, initially. Contemporary country music is a form of pop/rock and no label executive could have seriously expected radio to embrace O Brother's eccentric sounds. However, as the album gained press, accolades, sales and multiple Grammy awards, perceptions changed. O Brother was no longer merely the archaic sounding record that country radio refused to play. It became, instead, the award winning hit record—and then the pop culture phenomenon—that radio refused to play. Country Music Television, VH1 and MTV all programmed a video of "Man Of Constant Sorrow," featuring the film's fictitious Soggy Bottom Boys, fronted by the lip-synching Clooney. Radio kept away. Mercury twice released the song as a single—once before the Grammy awards and once after. A few stations eventually did add "Sorrow" to their playlists, most often in response to listener requests. It generally received few spins per day and programmers tended to drop it relatively quickly.[17]

For long-time proponents of traditional music, radio's obstinate response to the public acceptance of O Brother confirmed pre-existing beliefs regarding the medium's conservative tendency to homogenize culture. Irwin concluded that the album was "a nightmare for country radio programmers," who assumed incorrectly that it would fade quickly. When they found it still selling a year after its release, they were, he maintained, "too embarrassed to start playing it."[18] Their fumbling approach ended up becoming part

of the album's story—transforming the record, in Irwin's words, into "'The Little Engine That Could' of country music and a darling of the press."[19] Indeed, long before the Grammy telecast, radio's resistance to the steadily selling album became fodder for news stories. Just three months after the album's release, when radio's ultimate response to its success was still uncertain, USA Today reported that the album was fueling "already raging debates about whether country radio has forsaken the music's roots." One month later, an MSNBC internet report noted the album's burgeoning sales and the resultant media attention, while observing, "What makes the record's surge all the more perplexing is the absence of any radio play." Shortly thereafter, the New York Daily News effectively declared that very absence to be an indicator of the soundtrack's superior quality. "Most commercial country," the paper wrote, is "slicker than a disco ball." O Brother, by comparison, is "not country like country radio plays today. It's more concentrated and richer, several degrees closer to the roots." Speaking to the New York Times, Nashville DJ Eddie Stubbs termed radio's reaction a "disgrace," which came about because the record was "such a departure from what [programmers are] used to playing."[20]

Stubbs' remark summarizes the consultant-driven "less is better" ethos that revivalists malign. Research tells country radio executives that their largest single market consists of young mothers who make family buying decisions and whom advertisers are not willing to lose. These mothers, executives conclude, want the generally upbeat pop-flavored tunes that mainstream radio favors, not O Brother's archaic twang and death-obsessed spirituals. One hit album, which many executives suspected was either an artsy fad or a response to George Clooney's good looks, was not going to alter standard

commercial operating procedure. Moreover, so many radio programmers have grown up on a diet of "safe" radio that their own knowledge of country music's artistic roots is often severely limited. Since those roots, as presented on O Brother, sound foreign and unappealing to programmers, they are hardly prepared to risk their ratings—and their jobs—on the assumption that audiences will embrace such sounds over the long haul. Ironically, Paul Soelberg cited this identical problem in his 1970 analysis of the then dismal state of country radio, published at the time of Rounder's debut. More than 30 years later, as the Rounders helped promote the best selling roots music anthology in history, they confronted the identical ignorance and prejudice. Still, the album was a hit that found both buyers and favorable press. While six million in sales is undoubtedly an unrepeatable anomaly, many roots music devotees are now convinced that there exists a market for their passion, one that they might reach, project by project, without radio's help.[21]

While the narrow mindset of radio executives prompts ongoing concern, the consolidation of record labels is another area in which revivalists tend to believe that less is definitely not better. In this regard the "big four" record companies, which collectively account for roughly 80% of the revenue earned through disc sales, are particular targets. At the end of 2004 the big four consisted of the Universal Music Group, Sony BMG Entertainment, the EMI Group and the Warner Music Group—diversified entertainment conglomerates that own many of the label imprints known to consumers. Universal, for example, owns the legendary Motown, while Warner owns one-time folk stalwart Elektra, as well as rhythm-and-blues pioneer Atlantic. Criticism of the big four follows a predictable pattern—their costs are so high, and their interest in profit above all else is so

great, that they are congenitally risk averse. They avoid the daring and tend to follow any successful artist or style with a sound-alike, wanting nothing more than to replicate prior success. Unwilling to invest in long-term career development, which does not produce immediate profit and may never pay off, the majors typically drop any artist who does not become profitable quickly. Bob Dylan, whose first album sold only about 5,000 copies upon its initial release by Columbia—now part of Sony—would not have the opportunity to record a second major label album today. Bruce Springsteen, who was largely unknown until his third Columbia release, would today remain a New Jersey bit player instead of attaining international stardom.[22]

There are exceptions. Label executives, alarmed by declining CD sales, are increasingly aware of older consumers with an interest in music, money to spend and broad tastes. Nic Harcourt, a National Public Radio announcer who considers himself a part of this demographic, explains: "There's a whole bunch of us that are over 40 who grew up listening to what was adventurous music in the '60s and '70s—and in the '80s, for that matter—who are still interested in being exposed to good new music."[23] This audience is at least partially responsible for the unexpected success of O Brother. That, in turn, has encouraged industry efforts to reach adult buyers. Norah Jones is one beneficiary of this strategy. With her softly sung blend of jazz, pop and country, Jones sounds like nothing else on the current hit music scene, yet EMI subsidiary Blue Note released her debut album in 2002. In an extraordinary marketing success, Jones has sold millions of CDs and seems poised to become a lasting star. The same strategy helps explain the vitality of Warner-owned Nonesuch Records, begun in 1964 by Elektra founder Jac Holzman as a budget-priced classical label. Today it is a small, profitable

major label subsidiary with an eclectic roster that includes the avant-garde classical ensemble Kronos Quartet, Brazilian pop singer Caetano Veloso, and the long-popular Emmy Lou Harris, a veritable goddess among fans of rootsy country and folk.[24] The well-established Harris, a critic's favorite, lends cachet to a corporate roster, but she is unlikely to sell the number of records needed to keep the larger corporate ship afloat. The marketing of Jones required a considerable investment, which her label would have lost had she not defied probabilities and succeeded. Blue Note's willingness to take a chance on her is admirable but financial considerations preclude too many such risks. The big four require and desire a steady stream of successful releases. They consequently focus predominantly on sure things, which tends to favor artistic styles that echo prior hits. This relegates the unsigned majority of artists to obscurity.

While the major labels dominate sales, the folk scene encompasses an ever-changing cast of smaller labels numbering in the hundreds, which exist apart from the industry giants. Rounder is one of the most successful and enduring of these, some of which are nothing more than single-artist "do-it-yourself" enterprises. Examination of FOLKDJ-L's annual airplay summaries provide one measure of the role such "indies" play in the folk world. In 2004, 286 self-defined folk disc jockeys reported a total of 152,312 individual song plays, drawn from a total of 249 labels. Of the 20 most heavily played labels, only three—Columbia in the fifth position, Warner in the seventeenth and Warner subsidiary Rhino in the nineteenth—were part of the big four.[25] If he has his way, folk disc jockey John McLaughlin would see that number decline to zero. To the best of his ability McLaughlin refuses to play major label product on his weekly folk music show. Deviations from this policy occur only by accident, when "that sneaky tiny print"

on a CD case prevents him from discovering that what appears to be an independent is actually a major label subsidiary.[26]

McLaughlin's reasoning is straightforward. With a four-hour show broadcast once a week, he—like most folk DJs—controls a very limited amount of airtime. Since he can fill that time easily with good music on independent labels, he prefers not to give the majors more commercial access than they already have. "They've got too much airplay as is," he says. "They've got promotion money, they've got promotion sub-contracted out to people hustling their music, they've got all the weight in the world coming down against the indies . . . Hardly a fair marketplace, somehow." He concedes that the majors control some excellent folk music, much of which appeared initially on little labels now owned by one of the big four. He is willing to forego this material because he has plenty of equally good independent music to program. Behind McLaughlin's stance—which he refers to as "tiny blows against the empire"—lies an innate political perspective consistent with that which has historically made common cause with "the folk." "I don't like multi-nationals, instinctively," he says. "They're tied into globalization, that disaster for the eco-system of the globe . . ." He adheres to the oft-heard belief that, notwithstanding an occasional artistic gem, the major labels have no genuine interest in art and its relationship to culture. It is all "product" to them—"cabbages or kings, ships and shoes and sealing wax, what do they care?" "I'm not interested," he says, "in the careers of sycophantic MBAs, personally, nor in helping them to wreak continued damage to the planet and humanity, in the name of quarterly dividends."[27] He is equally harsh toward those artists who manage to gain entree to the major labels, dismissing them as akin to enemy collaborators. "We're dealing with more than naiveté," he writes of

them, "getting in the tank with these sharks. We're dealing with people blinded by the dollar signs in their eyes to the reality of the situation . . ."[28]

Judging from the commentary posted on FOLKDJ-L, McLaughlin's absolutist position has won sympathizers but no converts. While most folk DJs maintain that major organs of the media and the music industry care little about culture, there is no widespread rebellion against large-scale capitalism. Folk music broadcasters appear content to work within the prevailing economic system where they can, while voicing opposition within the established political framework. While that approach may be naive or self-defeating, it reflects the truism that revivalists as a group, like Americans generally, do not live lives on the barricades of open rebellion. Their more modest goal is to promote music and culture of a certain type and they are willing to support such expression wherever they find it. They tend to respect artists who hope to both make a living and disseminate their music as widely as possible. One FOLKDJ-L correspondent, rebutting McLaughlin, took a multi-faceted approach in considering why an artist might affiliate with the majors:

> These days, I share your distrust of the major labels, but not necessarily the artists who try to work with them. I'm not inclined to declare someone immoral for wanting to make a better living, or for wanting their work—whatever it may be—to touch as many people as possible. Some people sell their soul to the devil, others try to use him for their own purposes without succumbing, others just fall for false promises and are more to be pitied than scorned.[29]

Narrow radio playlists and limited major label rosters combine to constrain commercial opportunity for artists. There is, unfortunately, no guarantee that even with a record contract an artist will be able to find space on record store shelves. The remaining

aspect of Don Henley's broad critique of the music industry concerned the demise of the "magical" record stores of his youth—those eclectic shops staffed by true music fans who knew their inventory and appreciated artistry, whether it came in the form of an old-time banjo picker, an avant-garde horn player or an iconoclastic rock rebel. Record stores have always sold the hits but—with allowances for the usual nostalgic idealization—the overstuffed shop that also carried eccentric music and was always willing to hang a poster advertising a local performer, did actually exist. It was in such shops that Irwin, Nowlin and Leighton received much of their musical education, reading liner notes and listening to Folkways LPs. It was in such shops that they found initial outlets for Rounder Records. Scott Billington recalls the late 1970s when, as Rounder's first salesman, he drove through New England working a circuit of retailers. It was an era before national chains dominated record sales. Local store managers often had the freedom to decide what they would carry. Billington, who had once managed New England Music City, then one of Boston's largest record stores, was personable, knew record retailing and knew music, so he had some success in getting Rounder albums into folk and blues bins throughout the region, a key accomplishment in the label's first decade. In some instances, accommodating—and grateful—store managers simply allowed Billington to stock the relevant sections of their shops.[30]

In the decades following the great boom, such retailers were crucial partners in keeping the folk scene alive. Thus revivalists, like all music fans with non-mainstream tastes, react with concern when they see eclectic artist-friendly stores dying off. Analyzing the state of music retail in 2003, Billboard noted dispassionately that it "saw severe contraction." With greater passion industry analyst Clark Benson of the Almighty

Institute of Music Retail described that contraction as "carnage." According to data gathered by Benson's staff, roughly 1200 retail record stores closed their doors in 2003 and 2004. Many of these outlets were part of large chains but countless small shops—an "undetermined number" according to Billboard—suffered as well. The reasons for this decline are varied. While internet music downloading, both legal and illegal, may be one factor, the trend dates back years. It began, ironically, with an effort to offer musical eclecticism on a large scale. [31]

Tower Records, born as a single store in 1960, eventually embarked on an ambitious expansion program. It pioneered the concept of the "deep catalog" superstore, attracting staunch music partisans through a large and diverse inventory that offered bluegrass, rock's hardest core, classical music and much more. As the nineties began, Tower found itself in tight competition with similar deep catalog giants, most notably Britain's Virgin and HMV chains, then expanding aggressively in the United States. At a conference of company store managers in 1991, Tower president Russell Solomon articulated an essential component of his survival strategy. "Tower cannot have a competitor who has a better selection," he said. "Don't let your catalog down. Do it with mirrors if that's what you have to do to make your budgets work. We've got to have catalog."[32] Not to be outdone, Ian Duffel, then heading Virgin's U.S. expansion efforts, took an identical approach. "We buy everything that's available. Even if they don't sell, we stock them. We just have to be seen as having the definitive range (of products)."[33]

As the decade progressed these superstores faced competition from a new breed of non-traditional music retailers such as the Borders and Barnes and Noble bookstore chains, video purveyor Blockbuster Entertainment and the electronic and appliance giants

Best Buy and Circuit City. To varying degrees these new market entrants joined the almost fetishistic competition for inventory. Retailers insisted initially that the increase in stores would broaden the market to everyone's benefit, drawing new consumers to a growing number of wide-aisled, well lit and accessible outlets. In short order, however, the plethora of new music retailers began to cannibalize one another. Best Buy and Circuit City were soon enmeshed in a price war that roiled the industry. They discounted most discs heavily and in some cases they offered popular CDs below their own cost.[34] These stores had no particular interest in music. They viewed CDs as heavily advertised loss leaders, priced solely to draw potential customers in the hope that some might eventually purchase a new stereo system or washing machine. The low prices were possible only because the companies' profitability was not dependent on music sales. If music losses led to a few more high-ticket sales on those items that were the chains' primary focus, they were worth it. Other non-traditional music retailers soon entered the fray. Billboard reported that, at the end of 1994, CD price wars among the electronics giants, entertainment merchants such as Media Play, and mass merchandisers Wal-Mart and Kmart, had "squeezed music retailers' profit margins as thin as discs."[35]

The price wars did not initially affect all merchants in the same manner. Dedicated music superstores such as Tower tended to carry a deeper, more eclectic inventory than most of the mass-merchandisers. The local independents tended to offer better expertise and service for the hard-core music buff. The strongest in each of these categories had the best chance of survival. Most stores, however, relied on contemporary pop and the hits to at least some degree. In 1995, a year in which non-music stores sold 28 percent of the CDs in the U.S., the weaker "all-music" stores began to fail before the

onslaught of the multi-purpose behemoths.[36] Terry Hanks, the president of Soundwaves, a six-store Houston chain, complained, "I don't sell big-screen TVs. I don't sell dishwashers. I don't sell microwaves. So if I don't make my profit on music sales, I can't make it up by selling you something else."[37] The retail explosion of a few years earlier began to contract. By one account, roughly 300 music stores in the United States closed their doors forever in 1995, marking the beginning of an ongoing trend.[38]

There are the inevitable exceptions to this trend, of course—stores that benefit from a combination of good location, business acumen and luck. Punk-oriented Bionic Records in southern California took a cue from the mass-merchandisers and survived by selling skateboards and related accessories alongside CDs and vinyl LPs.[39] In Ville Platte, Louisiana, Floyd's Record Shop hangs on, selling a truly extraordinary collection of French music from deeply traditional Cajun and Creole to swamp pop classics to contemporary zydeco. Owned by legendary local record man Floyd Soileau, the shop benefits from the Cajun/Creole tourist industry that is now so important to the region as a whole. Nashville's Ernest Tubb Record Shop boasts an impressive collection of classic country, a selection made possible by its presence in a well-known music and tourist town. In Austin, Texas, my home, Waterloo Records offers a wide range of American roots music along with current hits. It is helped by its location in a college town that has a still-vital, roots-oriented commercial radio station. A thriving live music scene fuels a steady stream of customer-drawing in-store concerts. In 2004, threatened by the planned opening of a Borders directly across the street, the store helped mobilize community opposition to the chain's encroachment. Borders backed down, providing Waterloo with a salvation that may be only temporary.

All of these stores are anomalies, drawing attention precisely because they are rare. For the most part, particularly away from the diversity of larger cities, Americans buy their music from the chains, where selection is increasingly limited. Wal-Mart was the nation's largest brick-and-mortar music retailer in 2004, controlling 20 percent of major label CD sales. Best Buy and Target round out the top three retailers. The trio collectively account for roughly 50 percent of such sales, almost doubling the market share that all non-music specialists combined had enjoyed just ten years earlier. With continued retail contraction, there is no longer much pressure to compete on the basis of catalog diversity. While a typical Tower outlet might stock 60,000 titles, a Wal-Mart stocks approximately 5,000, eschewing struggling artists, independent labels and even the back catalog of major stars. Desiring to sell CDs for less than anyone else—a posture that can only increase its dominance—but no longer interested in losing money on the transactions, Wal-Mart uses its power to dictate terms to the labels, insisting on reductions in wholesale prices. This could benefit musicians under certain circumstances but Wal-Mart is not interested in the lot of the struggling artist. Wanting only to serve its goal of drawing people through the doors, it confines itself to those popular titles necessary to achieve that limited end. It thrives due to its ubiquitous presence, national advertising, bulk buying power, discount pricing and the revenue from its many other product lines. With the big three mass-merchandisers dominating sales of the hits, Tower is struggling financially and the purely local retailer is becoming one more quaint artifact of the past, a dying breed in need of protection. Mike Dreese, owner of Massachusetts-based Newbury Comics, which despite its name is a well-established deep catalog music

retailer, is blunt. "The only question is whether our death is in seven years or eight," he said in 2004. "Everybody's lights are out in ten."[40]

From his unique vantage point Rounder's Ken Irwin has witnessed the transition. What he calls the "corporatization" of music retail has led to "less knowledge and less passion" on the part of store staff. Wal-Mart and its ilk simply do not employ salespeople based on their ability to recommend quality bluegrass or zydeco to interested customers. The label's ability to promote music within the stores has also changed. In earlier times a Rounder staffer would mail a poster to a store clerk with whom he or she was often personally acquainted, at least through a telephone relationship. If the clerk liked it, he would tack it to the wall. Today that clerk has no such discretion. In-store promotions—posters, listening posts, end-cap displays—as well as shelf space itself, have become commodities, which stores sell to those record distributors with whom they enjoy ongoing and profitable relationships. Idiosyncratic small-selling artists—increasingly excluded from radio and major label rosters—are not likely to find a place in stores either.[41]

As Rounder grew, it endeavored to remain true to its identity as a purveyor of non-commercial vernacular eclecticism, retain the support of its historical customer base and survive in an increasingly business-like environment. It simultaneously endured occasional brickbats from vocal commentators who believe that all folk-oriented businesses have duties beyond those common to all honorable commercial interests. I know of no one in this context who condemns profit outright but some commentators expect folk entrepreneurs to utilize business practices that exemplify overtly a deep respect for the past and a strict communitarianism. In 1993, Old-Time Herald founder

Alice Gerrard contemplated the economic difficulties inherent in issuing old-time music on compact discs and bringing those discs to market. A onetime Rounder artist, she recalled the label's early days as a time of "youthful vision, great ideas, unlimited energies, dedication and passion about the music, willingness to sleep on floors and in vans, to run around reissuing and recording huge amounts of material, to operate on a shoestring." Contemplating changing times she acknowledged that the label was "now interested in operating with a profit margin." Sounding far more wistful than critical, she added:

> There is a part of us, I think, that feels they should continue to operate at some philanthropic level, that they owe it to the community and greater good to continue operating from dedication and passion only, and not from profit motives. A part of us feels that no one should make a commercial, profit-line venture out of this homemade people's music—music that is a part of all of us.[42]

Gerrard's tone was pragmatic and understanding. Other critics, however, harshly analyze any apparent "concession" to contemporary commercial needs for signs that Rounder is deviating from once-sacrosanct ideals. In 2004 a participant in an online blues discussion list posted a link to a Boston Globe article that discussed what it called Rounder's transformation into an "indie powerhouse," following the label's expansion "into the lucrative pop-rock world." The article quoted Rounder general manager Paul Foley, who reported that though the company still released roots music it was "not the small, bluegrass-folk label from Cambridge anymore." The listserv correspondent praised the label's heritage and wished it well while adding, "I can't get too excited about this change."[43] Of the three responses, one simply noted that the label had indeed changed, another said—in full—"I don't know if I could possibly puke any more," and a third

accused the Rounders of "dancing on the edge, with the devil," which the writer was certain would "bring them down one day." These varied comments were devoid of detail and analysis. No one discussed the nature of Rounder's contemporary releases or whether, absent the business practices described, it could afford to release any roots music whatsoever. To these commentators Rounder's reported shift to a more "corporate" structure and its embrace of more "lucrative" musical styles were simply negative developments and cause for alarm.[44]

In 1999 music critic Dave Marsh—who claims to cherish the Folk Alliance because it exalts music above commercial concerns—excoriated Rounder for offering one of his friends an artist's contract that Marsh considered the equivalent of a standard major label deal. He mocked the founders for failing to live up to their identity as "good collectivists," a characterization that the label owners had not used to describe themselves in over two decades. Shortly thereafter Marsh took Rounder to task for the termination of a long-time employee. Once again he characterized the label as a "collective," arguing that it was "supposed to be the benchmark good-guy independent." He seemed particularly outraged by an e-mail in which Nowlin addressed Marsh's concerns by declaring, "I do, in fact, consider Rounder to be 'just another record company.'" Marsh's tone was emotional not analytical, and his description of internal company events was one-sided. He appeared guided by his personal vision of how independent record companies in general should behave.[45]

Sing Out! editor Mark Moss, addressing a new Rounder distribution arrangement in 1998, expressed concern that a partnership with a major label might undercut the company's historical mission and endanger the vernacular heritage that Rounder had

always championed. In a thoughtful analysis, free of reflexive condemnation, Moss questioned an agreement reached between Rounder and Mercury Records, a division of the worldwide entertainment corporation Polygram, now part of Universal. The parties agreed that Mercury would distribute approximately 1000 records from Rounder's back catalog along with selected future releases. The deal provided some of Rounder's roots-oriented artists with the strength of Polygram's established nationwide distribution network, along with the marketing power of an international entertainment goliath. On its face it seemed a clear victory for the small-scale tradition-based music at Rounder's heart. If Polygram could help sell such music, it might benefit not only the particular artists and genres involved but also, by adding to Rounder's bottom line, the label's entire array of vernacular and political song.[46]

Moss feared the contract could hurt, not help, some of Rounder's most unique artists. The 1000 back catalog albums encompassed by the new distribution agreement accounted for roughly 90% of Rounder's 1997 sales volume of $24 million.[47] However, because certain albums sell far more than others, those same albums constituted less than half of the label's overall output. Seemingly, a minority of better sellers was getting enhanced attention from a label founded on the premise that the music, not its sales potential, was what mattered. Worried about that part of the Rounder catalog that fell outside the agreement, Moss wondered if Rounder could truly guarantee that music's continued availability, now that it stood apart from "the more successful material, which has provided the infrastructure necessary to promote and distribute the full line . . . " More fundamentally, he worried about any deal that aligned "the Rounder collective"—like Marsh, he used a characterization the label had abandoned 20 years earlier—with the

"megacorp" Polygram. Could Rounder's historical "focus on preserving and promoting quirky roots music be sustained," he wondered, if entrusted to those "enamored by the 'big fish eats the small fish' theory of good business." He urged all folk music lovers to be especially vigilant in light of this development, warning against the day when "we'll wake up to find all recorded music controlled by [international corporations] and our access to recordings by George Pegram, Aunt Molly Jackson or [the old-time band] the Freight Hoppers has simply evaporated."[48]

Moss raised a legitimate concern, which I will discuss later in this chapter. I note preliminarily that to varying degrees each of the concerns described above—those of the blues listserv correspondents, of Dave Marsh, and of Moss—rest on the underlying premise that Rounder had somehow undergone a relatively recent change for the worse. In each case this premise is flawed. While the pace of change at the label has arguably increased since the late 1990s, the company's history over the long term is one of relatively constant change. This change has always been in the direction of increased involvement with established elements of the music business with the goal of enhanced professionalism. Nowlin acknowledges that in Rounder's earlier days he found the idea of "marketing" distasteful because of its overt ties to the commercial world he hoped to avoid. However, the founders took to heart the advice of folklorist Archie Green, who told them early in their label's existence that if they wanted to introduce an alternative business model to the record industry, they needed to conduct business as well or better than their more established competitors.[49]

Whether because of Green's advice, a desire to better serve the artists and cultures they sought to represent, burgeoning professional and financial ambition, an inherent

desire to be good at what they do, or a combination of all of these, the Rounders began to professionalize almost immediately, a slow process that continues to produce change. As they attempted to master the existing commercial structure they became the capitalists they once disdained. "One thing we definitely learned," Nowlin says, "is that working within the system we ended up being shaped to the system in some ways."[50] The Rounders succeeded to a degree they never imagined. In 2004 the label's gross revenue was approximately $50 million, twice what it was just seven years earlier.[51] In the balance of this chapter I examine Rounder's shift toward—or its acceptance of—a highly professional role in a capitalist economy. I do not attempt a detailed label history. My goal is to survey Rounder's transition from a self-proclaimed "anti-profit" hobby to the proudly profitable roots/pop/rock hybrid it has become. I want to determine how a company that once sold records from a van at folk festivals now manages to sell them competitively at Wal-Mart. I explore how—if at all—a company that began by selling "peoples" music can maintain credibility while prospering in the age of media, label and retail consolidation. My primary interest lies in determining the impact, if any, that this transition has had upon the nature of the company's original mission, as exemplified through its music. Secondarily, I examine the affect that Rounder's increased professionalism has had upon the company's relationship with its employees and artists.

After taking delivery in October 1970 of 500 copies each of the Pegram and Spark Gap records, the Rounders set about the task of selling their debut LPs, despite having no idea what they were doing. They were thrilled when Discount Records on Harvard Square agreed to accept five copies of each album on consignment. They learned quickly, however, that there existed an institutional barrier that limited their ability to place the

records in stores. The overwhelming majority of retailers had no interest in purchasing from individual labels. Instead they obtained records through ongoing relationships with distributors—wholesalers who purchased from numerous labels, then re-sold the records to retail outlets within a regional or even local area of operation. The distributors concentrated on relationships with retail, freeing the labels to address music, artist relations and publicity. Those distributors who represented major labels with better sellers enjoyed a market advantage, since retailers wanted their products. In some cases distributors with a varied client roster could use the leverage afforded by better sellers to persuade retailers to stock a few lesser sellers. The stores enjoyed the opportunity distributors provided for the consideration of a wide range of merchandise, which saved a tremendous amount of time. All parties enjoyed significant economies of scale.

Few established distributors would work with a "label" that consisted of three inexperienced young owners hawking two relatively homemade, non-commercial albums. One that would was Jack's Record Cellar, an esoteric enterprise in San Francisco that offered jazz, blues and country music. In addition to maintaining a retail storefront, Jack's functioned as a small regional distributor and the Rounders considered it a coup when the west coast operation agreed to market 25 copies of each album. This arrangement, like the earlier consignment placement with Discount Records in Cambridge, did not bring the label any immediate revenue. Following standard industry practice, Jack's purchased the albums on credit, reserving the right to return them if they failed to sell. Still, this early distribution "success" is a remembered high point of Rounder's formative years. In practical terms, however, Jack's occupied a music industry niche only slightly larger than that of Rounder. From the standpoint of the overwhelming

majority of retailers—and consumers—Rounder's two debut albums may as well not have existed. The Rounders' attempts to remedy this situation moved along two tracks. On the one hand, they pursued a one-on-one strategy that involved direct communication with individual consumers. On the other hand, they pursued an industry strategy, in which they somewhat audaciously declared themselves a distributorship, in addition to being a record company.[52]

In pursuit of the one-on-one strategy the Rounders took to the road in their white van, traveling to folk and bluegrass festivals along a fairly wide swath of the eastern U.S. Upon arrival, they would set up a table, display their records and sell. I cannot overstate the significance of these trips, which went on through much of the seventies. The Rounders, year after year, met and mingled with a highly targeted audience who came to know them as music loving peers. Though the Rounders had music to sell, they also listened to music with the same sense of excitement as other festivalgoers. This had the dual benefit of helping the founders bond with their customers while introducing them to new music, much of which ended up on Rounder Records. The Rounders first heard the Fuzzy Mountain String Band, D.L. Menard and Michael Doucet on these trips, along with many others. When feasible, they visited the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress where they educated themselves through field recordings, reading and conversation. These efforts led to other releases and to meetings with folklorists Alan Jabbour, Archie Green and Ralph Rinzler who offered encouragement and tangible assistance. Jabbour, through the Hollow Rock String Band, became a Rounder artist himself. He credits the Rounders' repeated trips to "cool little folk festivals" with a significant role in their ultimate success, noting that Folkways' Moe Asch and Arhoolie's

Chris Strachwitz never did the same. Rinzler, despite a long association with Asch, asked the Rounders to release the albums he planned to compile from his Louisiana field recordings. Irwin believes this invitation was due to their constant festival appearances and a reputation that shifted rapidly from that of "being hippie radicals to being young hustlers," with the latter characterization offered in a positive vein.[53]

Roundup Records, the company mail order arm, grew from these festival trips. The Rounders, seeing an opportunity, collected the names and addresses of all who visited their sales table or van. They then mailed mimeographed descriptions of their latest offerings, along with an address and phone number for the placement of orders. For a while Mark Wilson helped with the mail order company. While the Rounders traveled, Wilson stayed in Massachusetts and received orders. He relayed these to the founders by phone, since they carried the bulk of physical inventory with them to sell on the road. When they collected a few orders, they stopped at local radio stations and asked for used record mailers in which the stations had received LPs. They packed their own albums in these mailers and shipped them to customers from a local post office. Thus, early mail order customers might receive Rounder albums from anywhere in the country, sometimes in envelopes that bore the return addresses of major labels.[54]

Even as they began to sell at festivals, the Rounders still hoped to place their albums in stores in order to reach a broad audience with maximum efficiency. As it became apparent that they could not do this without a distributor—or multiple distributors serving various regions—they began to approach retailers as Rounder Distribution, a "company" focused initially on New England but willing to work with any retailer who would have them. This was a laughable gambit and one that retailers saw

through immediately. True distributors did not confine themselves to two records, particularly records that the so-called distributor had released itself. Accepting this reality, the founders began to turn Rounder Distribution into a genuine distributorship. They made deals with other small labels, offering to do the legwork needed to place albums with retailers.[55] The neophyte Rounders were particularly ignorant, but even the owners of already established independent distributorships—those not affiliated with major labels—saw a need for education and organization within the field. In 1971 Steve Frappier of Riverboat Enterprises, a small Boston distributor, proposed a national organization through which independents distributorships could communicate with and learn from one another. Organizers scheduled an initial meeting in Chicago from February 3 through 5, 1972, immediately preceding the respected University of Chicago Folk Festival. Most invitees distributed some type of roots music, so organizers assumed that the Festival would draw people who might not otherwise travel to attend a business meeting. Given the relatively impoverished nature of potential participants, it was also advantageous that Chicago was, in Irwin's words, "a strong blues and folk city, [so] many of those attending the meeting would be able to find places to stay with friends."[56]

A dozen people attended including the three Rounder founders, and they collectively represented nine entities. The organization they founded—the National Association of Independent Record Distributors (NAIRD)—became an active trade group. As its scope broadened, it changed its name to the Association for Independent Music and survived for 32 years, before industry changes contributed to its demise. Founding distributors serviced labels such as Folkways, Arhoolie, County, Delmark—Chicago's own legendary blues label—and Floyd Soileau's various Louisiana imprints. In

Irwin's words, "Most of the NAIRD members in the beginning were part of the counterculture and we felt that what we were doing was important both culturally and politically. We were helping to make available music and culture which were not being offered by the major labels." In the organization's second year it allowed independent labels to join with distributors as "associate members." Irwin recalls coming to meetings with a small notebook filled with questions. He would walk from distributor to distributor, label to label, and ask each the same questions. He asked companies to exchange copies of their standard paperwork—mundane items such as invoices and packing slips—so he could garner ideas about how Rounder could improve. Meetings provided opportunities for Rounder Distribution to contract with new labels and for Rounder Records to form alliances with new distributors. Members learned which distributors could be trusted and which labels were easiest to sell. Most of the small regional distributors present wanted agreements with as many labels as possible because, says Irwin, "there was so much good and valid music which needed better exposure. Trimming label lists was not the way to go . . . Distributors wanted to be known as a good source for all the music outside the mainstream, not just for selected labels."[57]

Perhaps prophetically, Rounder Distribution's first success in obtaining a meaningful retail presence arose because they distributed a label that, quite by accident, had recorded a star. In 1969 acoustic guitarist Leo Kottke played a gig at the Scholar Coffeehouse in Minneapolis. Kottke was—and remains—a virtuoso whose predominantly instrumental work blends elements of blues, jazz and traditional folk. Oblivion Records—an aptly named label with no industry presence whatsoever—recorded the show, which it released as 12-String Blues. That same year Kottke signed

with Takoma Records, a small independent label from California. His Takoma release, entitled 6 and 12 String Guitar, found an audience. It was, in Irwin's words, "as steady a seller as there was in the roots market" of its day. In 1971 Kottke moved to Capitol Records, with which he subsequently recorded four albums. Despite Kottke's rising visibility, Oblivion could not secure New England distribution for its tiny and otherwise noncommercial catalog. It welcomed a deal with the Rounders. Retailers wanted Oblivion's interesting pre-fame Kottke record and Rounder thus enjoyed a previously unavailable level of retail access. Coming years before the success of George Thorogood this experience illustrated the ability of a successful record or artist to open doors. However, while the Rounders always strived to maximize opportunities, they did not respond by searching for additional "stars." The primary benefit of the Oblivion deal was that it helped the founders develop retail relationships and gain experience.[58]

Over time Rounder Distribution expanded its client roster. Takoma provided Rounder with the distributor's first significant label catalog, as opposed to the single significant album that Oblivion offered. John Fahey had co-founded Takoma in 1959, primarily as a home for his own acoustic guitar playing, which traversed the same folk/blues/jazz territory as Kottke's later work. By the late 1960s Fahey had found a wide following among a guitar-loving cognoscenti, which is what drew Kottke to the label. In addition to Fahey's numerous albums, the Kottke LP, and numerous other bits of musical esoterica, Takoma was the home of Bukka White, a Mississippi bluesman who had found a measure of renown as a boom-era "rediscovery." In Rounder's small world Takoma was a major player, and their alliance suggests that Rounder enjoyed a growing and favorable reputation. Rounder eventually reached a distribution agreement with County Records,

the old-time reissue label that had influenced the founders in the sixties. County's owner Dave Freeman had begun a mail order company anchored by the County Sales Newsletter, a still-published industry staple that reviews and sells tradition-based albums. County Sales carried Rounder releases, providing the young northerners with an established outlet centered in the southern bluegrass and old-time belt. Rounder Distribution, in turn, offered County access to its retail clients, then centered predominantly in New England.[59]

Recognizing the economic benefits of diverse offerings, Rounder Distribution sought relationships beyond the narrow confines of the folk revival. It made an early—albeit small—inroad into the world of rhythm and blues with Detroit's miniscule Fortune Records. It distributed a small amount of jazz through Biograph and Delmark, which were predominantly blues labels. The Rounder's recognized the need to respond to competition. Record People, a New York City distributor, branched into New England in 1975. It handled the same type of music as Rounder, and in some cases the same labels through non-exclusive agreements. In addition it distributed several jazz labels. The Rounders concluded that in order to protect themselves economically they needed to increase their own jazz offerings. By the early 1980s they distributed Concord Jazz, Contemporary and Muse, among others. They also handled El Saturn Records, a "label" limited to releasing the work of its owner, the eccentric avant-garde jazz master Sun Ra. Rounder's operation was hardly a fine-tuned professional machine. Particularly in its early years the company mixed a yearning for professionalism with a large dose of what I can generously describe as "indie spirit." Glenn Jones, who began purchasing for the distribution company in the late seventies, recalls his periodic meetings with Sun Ra.

Whenever Ra needed an infusion of funds he flew to Boston with a few hundred albums. Jones would meet him at the airport where he exchanged cash—Ra did not take checks—for records. Jones then had to place stickers on the record jackets in order to provide the titles and catalog numbers that retailers required.[60]

Building day-to-day professionalism proved a slow process. At times inefficiency hurt feelings and severed relationships. The founders all recall a watershed event sometime in the mid-seventies when an irritated artist told them that their obligation did not end when they released his records, they had to sell them as well. They took this to heart, they insist, acknowledging the need for improvement. No one remembers the details nor is anyone certain of the artist's identity, but Irwin recalls the incident arising in the context of an artist who left Rounder in search of increased label professionalism. This may have been Country Cooking, the innovative young bluegrass band from Ithaca that brought its third album to a Rounder competitor because of the founders' perceived inattention, demonstrating that even hippie musicians wanted to earn a living. Banjo player Pete Wernick advised Rounder by letter that the band was switching labels in search of better "promotion, distribution, and, hopefully, efficiency of communication and band-company relations." Wernick stressed that he liked the founders "as people" and the band members had "respect for Rounder's philosophy and musical direction." Nonetheless, he was disturbed by the amount of prodding required before the Rounders would respond to questions and requests for action. Urging the Rounders to accept his letter as "constructive criticism," he said, "I think it's in your own interests to change."[61]

Musician Robert A. "Tut" Taylor expressed related concerns in a letter he wrote to Rounder in the spring of 1974. Born in Georgia in 1923, Taylor is a self-taught expert

on the resonator guitar, or Dobro.[62] While virtually everyone plays the instrument by fingerpicking, Taylor plays with a flatpick, which helped him develop a distinctive sound. He recorded a bit in the 1960s but garnered no fame. Relocating to Nashville in 1970 he joined a circle of musicians who worked with multi-instrumentalist John Hartford. Predominantly an experimental bluegrass and old-time player, Hartford had the talent and good fortune to write "Gentle On My Mind," a smash for Glen Campbell in 1968. The song became the theme of Campbell's late-sixties television variety show, which often featured Hartford himself. Armed with a Warner Brothers' recording contract, Hartford released Aereo-Plain in 1971, a landmark in hippie-flavored old-time music on which he was accompanied by Taylor, guitarist Norman Blake and fiddler Vassar Clements, who later billed himself as the progenitor of "Hillbilly Jazz."

Though Hartford was then out of its reach, Rounder pursued his sidemen successfully. In 1971 the label released Taylor's Friar Tut, followed by separate releases from both Blake and Clements. Taylor co-produced Blake's effort and, also for Rounder, produced 1972's Brother Oswald by fellow Dobroist Beecher "Pete" Kirby, a veteran of Roy Acuff's band and the Grand Ole Opry. Blake, Clements and Kirby also made guest appearances on Will The Circle Be Unbroken, the now legendary, Grammy-nominated, old-time country album spearheaded by the rock world's Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and released in 1972 by United Artists. Through intense drive and hard work, the very young Rounder had placed itself in the thick of a burgeoning experimental old-time music scene, which it helped to foster, and which stood on the edge of an unexpected commercial opportunity. It then, at least in Taylor's estimation, fumbled that opportunity. In his 1974 letter Taylor lambasted the company, claiming that the label had "done such a

poor job on distribution and has been so slow in getting out records" that, he estimated, it had "lost several thousand dollars for us all." He then offered a sentiment that appeared to strike a chord with the young entrepreneurs. "You may be non-profit," he wrote, "but when you release albums you have an obligation to the public to make them available." Irwin's response blamed poor communication and "many mixups with the pressing plant." While he argued that the problems were not as bad as Taylor stated, he acknowledged deficiencies and stressed the founders' desire to learn and improve. "We are still open to suggestions for improvement," he wrote. "We are working hard to correct our shortcomings [and have made great progress] in the past few years." With respect to Rounder's non-profit stance, he seemed almost defensive. "Lastly, on the non-profit question, we are not profit motivated, but that does not mean that we care any less about our work. In fact, we often work 14-16 hours a day without pay because we believe in what we are doing."[63]

While the Rounders were young, inexperienced and probably somewhat disorganized, many of their problems were almost certainly due to the fact that they stretched themselves so thinly. By the end of 1974 Rounder had issued 63 titles and was distributing many more. The workload was enormous. In addition to tending to the needs of the distribution company they were negotiating with and signing artists, planning recording sessions, mixing records, and arranging for the manufacture of albums, which involved pressing the vinyl, creating cover art and writing their often detailed liner notes. Nowlin and Leighton had income-producing side jobs. Leighton, additionally, obtained a Master's degree in European history from Northeastern University in the 1970s. Running Rounder initially from an apartment they shared, they rose early, gobbled some cereal

and worked—often, as Irwin said, for 16 hours at a stretch. Holy Modal Rounder Peter Stampfel, who observed them in the label's early days, recalls with understatement, "It was their home, it was their work, it was what they did. And there was so much of it to do that they were pretty full time." Food was merely fuel. Sleep, as Nowlin puts it, was "an interruption." The idea of a leisurely meal or an alternate activity was incomprehensible. After they retired for the evening, Irwin and Nowlin would frequently discuss plans from their respective bedrooms, which were actually doorless alcoves, shouting out ideas and schedules. At times Leighton grew irritated. Of the three, she most desired a balanced life. She wanted at times to do something "frivolous," such as lie in bed and read a book.[64]

The Rounders had assumed initially that their collective would grow, allowing for the distribution of the workload. It proved difficult, however, for someone to fully enter their world. A love of old-time music and a desire to enter the record business were not enough. A potential collectivist also had to share the Rounders' political ideals and be willing to live with and spend virtually all their time with his or her colleagues, working non-stop, for little money, in a single-minded devotion to the cause. More importantly, they had to find an emotional comfort zone within the shared history of the three founders, a relationship that encompassed Leighton and Irwin's romance and its lengthy aftermath. They never found anyone who could manage this in the long term, and it is uncertain that they could ever have truly let someone in. Looking back, Nowlin concedes there was a "dynamic" among the original trio "that definitely excluded people." "It would," he adds, "have been a hard thing to penetrate." Only three made the attempt. Cornelius "Skip" Ferguson, a casual friend from the Boston area, tried his hand as a

Rounder but departed quickly, dropping out of his colleagues' lives completely. Bruce Kaplan, a fellow old-time music enthusiast who met the founders at the Galax, Virginia, fiddling contest was a Rounder from 1971 to 1974**.** He joined the group without relocating from his Chicago home. He may have lasted as long as he did because he was cut off from the stress of the founders' daily lives but this separation also contributed to his departure. Despite often-daily telephone calls his absence kept him from being a true member. He departed, however, with his enthusiasm for the roots music business intact. He founded Flying Fish Records, taking with him some of the Rounder artists with whom he was most involved, in a division the Rounders describe as friendly. Flying Fish became a staple of the folk industry until Kaplan's premature death in 1995.[65]

The final addition was Bill Kornrich, Nowlin's former roommate from Chicago and New York who was a Rounder for two years beginning in the summer of 1974. When Kornrich joined Rounder the collective had recently moved to a large house on Willow Ave. in Somerville, just outside Boston, which served as home, office and warehouse. Kornrich moved in and began drawing the same minimal salary that the founders received. While memories vary, this lay somewhere between $100 and $400 per month per person. Despite friendly times and a fair amount of socializing, his tenure ended unhappily for him. He never grew truly close to Irwin and Leighton. In his mind they held strong views and generally presented a united front whenever a disagreement arose. He believes that his friendship with Nowlin and the latter's closeness with the others presented a divide that none of them could bridge. While he applauded the goal of releasing non-commercial, culturally distinctive music, he found Rounder's political trappings to be oppressive and ridiculous as practiced. He believes that leftist rhetoric

was merely a tool with which one faction or another tried to gain advantage when internal conflict arose.[66]

Kornrich says that what drove him from the collective was a decision involving the role of Danny Wilson, the younger brother of Rounder collaborator Mark Wilson. Danny tended the mail-order company, which had grown large enough to require full-time attention. He drew no salary and he was not, by choice, a collective member. Working but not living at the Willow Ave. house, he purchased LPs from the distribution company, filled orders and pocketed the mark-up. By the mid-1970s Rounder was doing well financially. With the bulk of the money derived from distribution, Kornrich recalls gross revenue when he arrived of approximately $30,000 per month, which he believes rose toward $80,000 per month when he left in 1976. The collective was using most of the money to expand. In 1976 Rounder released 32 albums—an average of almost three per month—bringing its total to 124. Nonetheless, the person at Willow Avenue making the most money personally was Danny Wilson, comfortably engaged in his capitalist endeavor. Kornrich insists that the founders decided they should retain this money and pushed Wilson aside. They assumed control of their mail order inventory and profits and have maintained that control ever since. Nowlin has a vague memory that Wilson may have been unhappy with the group when he left but he denies any avaricious purge. Wilson says his time at Rounder encompassed both friendship and discord. He remembers Kornrich with great fondness but does not recall that his own departure involved any particular unfairness. He was ready, he says, to return to his Pacific northwest home. The Rounders paid him for his inventory and he left willingly. Kornrich, however, saw in Wilson's departure the "betrayal of a friend."[67]

The founders dispute Kornrich's characterization of life at Willow Ave. Nowlin —who identified Kornrich to me, provided me with his old friend's e-mail address, and urged me to talk to him—seems genuinely surprised. Kornrich tells his story with emotion and apparent conviction, while the founders ask with equal conviction how they could have betrayed Wilson given that he never felt betrayed. Kornrich's ultimately unhappy tenure at Rounder suggests at least two things. One, while the founders possessed a sincere utopian vision, they also possessed a group insularity and a desire for control that may have doomed any genuine collectivist impulse from the outset. Second, that the desire to run their business successfully channeled them quickly into the existing commercial apparatus, one governed by the rules of capitalism. One early employee, whose tenure overlapped Kornrich's in part, offers oblique agreement with each of these propositions when noting sardonically that Kornrich only thought he was a member of the collective, and that the Rounders did not so much transition to the capitalist system as come to recognize that they were part of it.[68]

Each founder agrees that their initial conscious step away from collectivism and toward a traditional capitalist business model was the hiring of their first salaried employee, and each credits Holy Modal Rounder Peter Stampfel with encouraging this transition. In an early 1970s visit Stampfel saw how hard they were working and asked why they did not hire someone to help. They had resisted this step, which seemed in opposition to their stated desire for a company that had "no bosses . . . with all finances in common." Stampfel, whom the Rounders respected, turned their rhetoric around, arguing that working at Rounder would be an interesting job for the right person. If he wanted a job, he maintained, he would resent an ideology that denied him the opportunity merely

because he chose not to devote all aspects of his life to the enterprise. Some people, he pointed out, simply wanted interesting work. Whether it was due to Stampfel's logic and influence, a desperate need for help, or changing attitudes about the wisdom or profitability of collectivism, the Rounders became employers, setting the stage for the union organizing drive that stands as one of the more ironic episodes in the company's history.[69]

Early hires suggest that Stampfel insisted correctly that music lovers in particular would happily accept employment with this young, hip record company. Scott Billington was a working musician when he arrived in 1976 to serve as Rounder's first paid salesman. His swing band Roseland was then struggling to build an audience base in the Northeast. With a young daughter, he needed more money than the band could provide so he began selling albums released by Rounder and its distributed labels to retail accounts, sometimes calling on stores as his band traveled between gigs. Glenn Jones, also a musician, joined in the summer of 1977. He began by purchasing for Rounder's distribution arm but he worked in shipping and receiving as well. He realized quickly that there was little formal separation between employee responsibilities and he liked the fact that the company was "chaotic and loose." Potential employees, he says, appreciated "the passion and the interest on the part of the people that worked there. Nobody came there because it was a job."[70]

Billington believes that as the founders shifted from self-identified collectivists to employers they struggled with a figurative "schizophrenia that persisted for many years." On the positive side, he explains, this led to a workplace that empowered employees, encouraging them to take on added responsibilities voluntarily. On the negative side,

employees who so extended themselves rarely received financial rewards, an omission that bred strong resentment. By 1979, now ensconced in a warehouse, the label employed roughly two-dozen people and George Thorogood's unexpected ascension to rock stardom compounded any pre-existing problems. Before Thorogood the owners frequently worked alongside employees, performing functions as mundane as the physical preparation of shipments to stores. Afterward, tending to the Thorogood phenomenon required them to address countless new business details. The owners became a more distant and—some employees assumed—a wealthier elite. Always hard workers, they could be tough taskmasters. Jones, whom the company fired in 2000, claims the owners would "accuse us of not working as hard as we should be." He recalls one founder letting staffers know they were "replaceable." With the company appearing to be successful, workers concluded, in Billington's words, that the time had come for "a better compensation package" and benefits such as health insurance and vacation time that were "more clearly defined." The founders, Billington adds, acted as if everybody's labor was in furtherance of an "altruistic vision." Despite admiring that vision, he believed that ownership imposed the obligation to balance vision with the need to provide "a little positive feedback and . . . some way to make it all make financial sense for the people that work for them."[71]

A group of employees, led in part by Jones, felt sufficiently aggrieved to approach Local 925 of the Service Employees International Union and, in 1979, initiate an ultimately successful organizing drive. The Rounders hired the Boston law firm of Hale and Dorr and resisted fiercely. Billington abstained from the vote, hoping that he might serve as some sort of conciliatory "third force." Not particularly political and somewhat

of an idealist, he saw the issue less in terms of a clash between labor and capital and more as a human failure to communicate. "Sometimes," he says, "I feel if the Rounders had had better people skills the union would not have happened." Upon losing, the founders were unforgiving. They closed ranks and stopped talking to organizers for almost a year. They were, Nowlin explains, "offended" that a "group of people had drawn a line in the sand and said, 'We're not in this together. It's us vs. you.' And so we saw ourselves as under siege to some extent." Looking back on Rounder's response after a quarter-century has passed, Nowlin expresses no regret, though he concedes it is fair to ask how, given their initial vision, the Rounders found themselves opposing the organization of their workers. He offers a variety of explanations, while acknowledging "some discomfort with hypocrisy." The founders, he says, worked inordinately hard themselves, in addition to reinvesting the bulk of their revenue in the company. They had "good motives" in dealing with their workers, though he concedes that poor personnel management skills might have obscured their positive intentions. "If we can't manage to have a fourth or fifth member of the collective that's truly part of the collective," he says, "then it's not surprising that the same kind of distancing happened with [employees]." He says that research he conducted in 1979 demonstrated that Rounder's wages were consistent with those paid by similarly-sized record companies. Working at Rounder, he notes, was hardly the equivalent of laboring in the coal mines from which Molly Jackson's family emerged. Referencing the label's several recorded collections of union songs, he argues that a business need not be a union shop to explore and exalt labor's historic role.[72]

Those who adopt an ardent pro-labor stance may forever see Rounder's union history as a mark of rank hypocrisy driven by the desire for control and personal gain.

Dave Marsh suggests as much when he arms his contemporary critiques of the label with snide references to the "good collectivists," insisting on a characterization that the Rounders abandoned long ago. Certainly, in instinctively taking "offense" at the organizing drive the founders appear to have misunderstood the fundamental distinction between the position of owners—who may ultimately reap great rewards through their control of assets—and that of workers, who generally have fewer material resources and, absent protection, are always uneasily dependent on remaining in the owners' good graces. I believe subjectively that the founders feared that unionization could foster the demise of their company, at a time when Thorogood's success offered them a new level of cultural influence and profitability. Whether one sees them as most concerned with a perceived breach of faith by their employees, by the prospect of lost influence or by the possibility of reduced profits, depends largely upon one's personal biases. Mindful of uncertainties and varied perceptions, I have sketched the story of Rounder's union opposition not to condemn the company as anti-labor nor to praise it for its involuntary status as a union shop, but because that story is an integral part of the company's history, helping to illustrate the often painful choices and trade-offs faced by those who desire success in the marketplace.

The impact of Thorogood's commercial breakthrough reached far beyond its contribution to Rounder's unionization. Artistically, as I discussed in Chapter 5, it helped the founders conclude that the Rounder vision could appropriately encompass a broader range of roots music than they once contemplated. Professionally it thrust the Rounders into the marketplace to a degree previously unimagined. The Rounders initially pressed 1708 copies of Thorogood's debut, plus an additional 300 "promotional" LPs. They sent a

routine printed solicitation to their existing distributors, describing the record in terms they hoped would produce orders. California Record Distributors ordered 500 copies, an unusually high number and an early indication of interest. They also mailed promotional copies to radio stations with appropriate formats, based on leads from their distributors and information gleaned from industry "tip sheets"—mimeographed weekly mailings containing airplay charts and brief reviews. The first station to play the record heavily was KTIM, a low-wattage outlet just north of San Francisco. Tony Berardini, the program director and a late-night DJ, loved the rawness of the album. He spread the word through tip sheets and informally with friends. As he later wrote to Irwin, "A bunch of jocks from various stations used to get together at my house every other week to listen to new stuff, imports, etc. and the Thorogood album was a major hit."[73]

The founders began calling stations hoping to generate momentum. Steve Leeds, a young promoter at Atlantic Records, offered to pitch the album to radio stations along with his employer's material. Leeds hoped to build his credibility by letting disc jockeys know that he cared about good music generally, not just that which Atlantic released. Some of Rounder's distributors worked directly with independent radio promoters, whom the distributors hired to promote Thorogood. The Rounders eagerly cooperated. Valerie Kargher, who worked at the Philadelphia distributor Richman Brothers, believed Thorogood would do well in that city. Before the artist's appearance at a local club, Leighton worked with Kargher on radio advertising and other aspects of promotion. An internal Rounder memo written to Irwin at the time stressed that the Philadelphia distributor "wants to be sure his orders . . . get to him fast in case he does have a rush." The Rounders used the Thorogood momentum to cultivate relationships with new

distributors where possible and to solidify relations with their pressing plant, which had to respond to an unexpected demand for LPs. With the release of Thorogood's second album the cycle repeated with greater intensity. The founders arranged for Thorogood to perform at the annual conference of the National Association of Recording Manufacturers and for other industry groups. One or more of the founders accompanied him on tour almost constantly, including 17 dates on which Thorogood opened for the Rolling Stones. While tending to the overwhelming amount of unfamiliar detail, they had to address overtures from those offering to buy Thorogood's contract. Some suitors wanted to buy Rounder itself. Irwin, recalling the heady days when Thorogood became a star, says, "Each day was a challenge, each day was a learning experience. In a matter of a few months, we learned more about the real world of the record business than we had in the previous eight years."[74]

Thorogood introduced the Rounders to Duncan Browne, who for almost 20 years helped spearhead the company's expanding distribution efforts. Browne was a one-time Boston record store owner who had befriended Thorogood before the blues-rocker signed with the label. He relocated to Los Angeles in 1975, where he became head buyer for The Wherehouse record retail chain and worked for several record wholesalers. He met Irwin and Leighton when they accompanied Thorogood to a Los Angeles filming of the television show Midnight Special. Musing about his desire to return to Boston led eventually to the offer of a management position from the Rounders, who were then juggling an extraordinary workload. In the summer of 1979 Browne began managing the company's warehouse in Cambridge. In a minor way his arrival helped fuel the union drive, as already unhappy employees voiced suspicion about this perceived industry

operative who arrived from Los Angeles to run things. Analyzing the distribution company, Browne saw a relatively small operation centered mostly in New England. Tiny Arhoolie was one of its most established clients. To distribute its own records outside of New England, Rounder worked with a network of independent distributors, drawing largely on contacts it formed through NAIRD. Most of these distributors mixed Rounder albums with more commercial records, while a relative few focused with varying degrees of expertise upon a narrow niche such as bluegrass or blues. With the exception of deep-catalog stores such as the growing Tower chain, few retailers had much need for a wide range of Rounder offerings .[75]

Understanding their music's commercial limitations, the Rounders and Browne tried hard to maximize opportunity. They recognized that if they represented more record companies offering a wider range of music they might appeal to more retailers. Over the course of the 1980s Rounder Distribution grew to encompass approximately 500 labels. The founders also expanded their geographic reach. At various times in the eighties and early nineties, Rounder employed salespeople in Albany, Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Denver, Nashville, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Washington, DC.[76] The expansion of the distributorship brought tangible economic benefits. "Distributing other labels," says Leighton, "gave us the cash flow to be able to grow at a very rapid rate. That has allowed us the freedom to continue to do exactly what we want to do."[77] Leighton also believes that the broadening network helped them to better serve their niche musical genres. Commenting in 1990 she noted, "Because we are an indie there is only so far we can get in the commercial marketplace, particularly if the artist isn't out there self-promoting . . .

In the alternative marketing system, though, there's no question that we can sell more and do a better job putting out a traditional blues act than a major label could."[78]

By controlling distribution themselves, the Rounders could also avoid the excessive reliance on others that sometimes led to commercial disaster. When Thorogood opened for the Rolling Stones at the New Orleans Superdome in 1981 Rounder's local distributor had only about 25 copies of each of the artist's albums on hand, presumably losing countless sales. A more serious situation arose in 1991 when St. Louis-based House Distribution, which distributed Rounder in much of the midwest, faced bankruptcy. Rounder entered negotiations to acquire the troubled firm, while it also considered establishing its own network in the region. "Why go another 60 days," Browne said, "losing market share in that area? [There is] a need for effective distribution dealing with non-hit independent product. To really present those labels in an attractive way to retailers, one needs to have more of a presence in that [midwestern] marketplace." Rounder did purchase House and acquired its warehouse in Olathe, Kansas. Thinking that a West Coast presence would be helpful, the label also entered negotiations for the purchase of Bayside Distributing, an established California operation. That effort did not bear fruit, but Rounder was clearly striving for its own national network.[79]

In seeking that national presence, Rounder was merely trying to stay abreast of its industry. By the early nineties record distributors were moving steadily toward the creation of truly national operations. The increasing consolidation of retail was the primary reason for this. With chains capturing an increasing percentage of consumer dollars, an ever-smaller group of influential retailers sought to deal only with highly systematized distribution networks, capable of offering a predictable methodology with

respect to product delivery, payment and marketing. According to distributor Michael Koch in 1992, "Regional distribution is a thing of the past. Nationalization is a necessity as the market becomes more flooded with product. You have to do more and more homogenous marketing coast to coast, because the competition is so severe. [A label] cannot market an artist having to rely on 10 different [distribution] companies." Fellow distributor Burt Goldstein agreed, arguing that a national distributor had not only a greater ability to market effectively, but also a greater incentive to do so. "Being truly national gives you the opportunity to manage inventory properly and move it faster. The enthusiasm you can generate spreads more quickly across the nation when it's internal. You care more when you have the whole country. " This trend did not necessarily please record companies. Phil Jones of Fantasy Records worried about the potential devastation to his company if a single national distributor developed a significant problem. A weak link somewhere in a national system, he said, "can cause serious trouble."[80]

Rounder hoped it could avoid the more obvious pitfalls by distributing nationally but doing it itself. Toward that end it formed an alliance in 1992 with Rykodisc, a Salem, Massachusetts-based record company that owned a Minneapolis distribution center called Eastside Digital. The new partnership then purchased Seattle's Precision Distribution, resulting in a continent-spanning distribution firm named REP. The partners intended REP to distribute the "top twenty indie labels," which included both Rounder and Rykodisc. At its inception REP did not reach retail accounts in all regions of the country but such national capability was a stated goal. Rounder still retained sole ownership of Rounder Distribution, which distributed hundreds of other small labels but not the product of its own parent, now handled by REP. To escape the resulting confusion, the

Rounder-owned entity, with Browne as its President, changed its name to Distribution North America (DNA). In 1994 DNA embarked upon its own partnership with southern California's Valley Distribution. Nowlin saw this new firm—which operated under the DNA name—as one that combined national and regional capabilities. "We have the national distribution capability," he said. "But we are happy to do regional distribution" where that is more appropriate for smaller labels or targeted releases. "We hope that this [new company] proves to be a comfortable home for those [labels] who want to stay regional."[81]

Rounder simultaneously sought to professionalize its marketing. Susan Piver joined the company in October 1992, moving from tiny Antone's Records, a blues label based in Austin, Texas. Antone's released perhaps five records per year. In 1992 Rounder released approximately 90 albums. It was a large step up for Piver. No one offered her a meaningful job description. The Rounders wanted to sell more records and they hoped that she could help. She discovered a 22-year-old company that, in her opinion, lacked any coherent marketing philosophy. She endeavored to create a systematic approach, hoping that it would both sell albums and survive her tenure. Her predecessor had worked alone and from what she could determine did little but place print ads in relevant media. The company was awash in lists—lists of retail outlets, lists of radio stations, lists of print media. No one had coordinated these lists so that, for example, those charged with radio promotion could determine if a receptive broadcast market also contained a store that sold, or might sell, Rounder's records. Piver initiated such coordination. In a company strong on genre diversity she was the first to engage in genre promotion in a meaningful way. She created separate "genre catalogs" for retailers, so they could more easily delve

into the company's myriad offerings. To help stores that wanted to augment their blues line, or their old-time offerings, but did not know how to begin, she supplied in-house "best-seller" lists in distinct musical categories. She initiated genre-specific promotions in which she might designate June as "bluegrass month" and provide relevant discounts to distributors. Her goal was to awaken both distributors and retailers to the potential within the vast, somewhat confusing Rounder offerings.[82]

Piver also established Rounder's first formal release schedules. Previously the company had, with rare exceptions, released albums when the product was ready, with little regard for the number and nature of other albums coming out at the same time. She attempted to group releases in a manner that made marketing sense and encouraged the creation of meaningful marketing priorities among albums. She tried to attend to those priorities for a reasonable time, to give an album a fair opportunity to succeed. At times the founders chafed at these systems. They sometimes competed with one another regarding priorities, with each urging greater attention to a favored release. They could also display short attention spans. Rounder has always released a great many albums and the founders were often eager to shift their efforts to newer projects, without regard to whether a prior release still warranted attention. As part of her efforts, Piver established sales projections for each new release. Rounder had never done this before but once the system was in place the founders never hesitated to ask if sales matched expectations. While Piver never found the Rounders to be overly encouraging of her efforts, she accepted that encouragement was simply not their style. They indicated acceptance of her approach by allowing her to proceed, by making sporadic efforts to rein in their own occasionally pronounced disorganization and by authorizing the marketing expansion that

she desired. Over the four years that she worked at Rounder Piver built a department of 13 people, which she supervised as the newly designated Vice President of Sales and Marketing.[83]

Piver's most satisfying professional accomplishment while at Rounder was the 1995 marketing of the hugely successful Alison Krauss compilation Now That I've Found You: A Collection. By 1995 Krauss and her band, Union Station, had earned critical acclaim and three bluegrass Grammy Awards. Her 1992 album Every Time You Say Goodbye illustrated the stylistic blend that was fueling Krauss's growing popularity. In addition to the bluegrass standard "Orange Blossom Special" it covered songs by the Beatles and folk/pop star Shawn Colvin. That record sold more than 200,000 copies, making Krauss Rounder's biggest selling artist since Thorogood in the late seventies. She had not, however, had a hit country single. Krauss wanted to release a new song, "O Atlanta," in advance of the 1996 summer Olympics scheduled in that city. Since she was not yet prepared to record a full album either Irwin or Piver—the two disagree—came up with the idea of releasing a compilation of older material plus the new song. A single from that album, "When You Say Nothing At All," appeared simultaneously on a various artists' compilation entitled Keith Whitley: A Tribute Album released by BNA Records, a member of the RCA label group. Rounder's staff worked jointly with that of BNA to market and promote the single, which rose to number three on Billboard's country singles chart. Her Rounder compilation album took off, selling approximately 2 million copies and reaching number two on Billboard's country album chart. In the fall of 1995 Krauss garnered five Country Music Association Awards. For Rounder it was an absolutely unprecedented success.[84]

Rounder released two additional singles from the Krauss compilation—"Baby, Now That I've Found You" and "O Atlanta." Neither enjoyed the major label involvement of the hugely successful first single and neither received significant airplay. "Baby" peaked at number 49 on Billboard's country singles chart and "O Atlanta" did not do even that well. Brad Paul, who supervises radio promotion for Rounder, blames a variety of factors for this relatively poor performance. Primary among these was a feeling among station programmers that the later singles were "too bluegrassy." While Paul is undoubtedly correctly recounting programmer reaction, fans of the hardcore bluegrass pioneered by Bill Monroe would find such attitudes laughable as applied to these relatively pop-flavored singles. Paul adds that he also encountered bias against both Rounder—"an indie label"—and Krauss, whom some programmers considered a young "upstart" not yet deserving of her industry accolades. Krauss's relative youth and shyness compounded these institutional problems. At the time she was uncomfortable granting radio interviews or participating in station promotions, which Paul terms "key factors in the country radio game." Thus, at the point of its greatest popular success Rounder confronted the limitations that commercial radio imposed upon independent labels promoting bluegrass records with "upstart" female artists unwilling to play the "game." It was a reminder that for some in the industry, it was not necessarily the quality of the music that mattered.[85]

While Piver tried to institute a professional marketing approach, Rounder's attempts to expand its distribution network foundered. In 1994, after a partnership of barely two years, Ryko purchased Rounder's interest in REP in what Nowlin describes as a contentious "forced sale." Rounder's participation in the ambitious effort to distribute

the "top twenty" indie labels nationally came to an end. DNA took over the distribution of Rounder's albums. In 1997, however, DNA also fractured and Rounder's partner, Valley Distribution, acquired Rounder's one half share of that enterprise. After roughly a quarter century, Rounder was no longer in the distribution business. In the short-term DNA—now owned by Rounder's ex-partner—would continue to distribute the company's albums. Long-term distribution arrangements were unsettled.[86] These ruptures were due in part to differences in personal style. Leighton—with a remark that hints at Rounder's earlier difficulties with both co-collectivists and employees—says that though the Rounders have always been successful partners with one another, they have made mistakes where third parties are involved, though the trio cannot always agree on the nature of those mistakes. Both Leighton and Nowlin maintain, however, that the biggest single factor in the demise of Rounder's role as a distributor was the retail crisis of the mid-1990s, which devastated many of the record stores that had stocked Rounder albums.[87]

One immediate and tangible by-product of retail contraction was a significant increase in the number of returns received from stores. By industry practice distributors and stores receive merchandise on credit. If an album fails to sell within a negotiated period of time, stores have the right to return it without payment. In the early nineties, as retail expanded and stores competed for the deepest catalog imaginable, Piver had found an ideal environment in which to pursue her tactic of aggressive genre promotion. Everyone, she recalls, wanted a bluegrass section or a blues or a folk section or all three. With two decades of eclecticism behind it Rounder was well positioned to satisfy retailers who were interested in more than the latest hits.[88] As the stores consumed one

another things changed dramatically. Billboard reported in 1996 that "returns are coming back to manufacturers so heavily now that their warehouses can't keep up with the flow."[89] Rounder had historically seen returns that hovered in the range of ten to twelve percent of records shipped to retail. In 1996 returns topped thirty percent and they remained unacceptably high for several years. Gross revenue declined dramatically, requiring the company to reduce staff and alter release plans. It weathered the downturn in the short term because the early nineties had been strong and because Krauss's recent breakthrough had provided a large infusion of cash.[90] The turmoil, however, prompted a financial awakening. Leighton in particular concluded that the label's internal accounting had always been poor, allowing the founders to believe they were at least breaking even despite a failure to take adequate account of ordinary business costs such as capital depreciation.[91]

Retail contraction "decimated" independent distribution—to use Leighton's characterization—in favor of major label networks with the leverage afforded by ready cash and a relatively large number of steady sellers. The "alternative marketing system" that Rounder struggled to master in the eighties was gone. According to industry analyst Brad Hunt, the mass-merchandisers that now dominate record retail want to be certain that distributors will help support marketing efforts with the "dollars necessary for promotion and positioning." While neither an overnight nor a black-and-white transformation, this was a definite shift in the terrain and one that Rounder needed to address if it was to continue to produce large numbers of diverse records. Its historical retail base was declining. Emerging corporate retail outlets offered less shelf space, drove tougher bargains and wanted to deal with fewer distributorships. For Rounder to maintain

a presence in what Leighton calls the "transitional" and "challenging" industry of the late 1990s, it needed to either adapt or content itself with embracing a reputation as a small boutique. It chose to adapt. For over two decades, Leighton says, the founders tended to run the company "from the gut." They had been "remarkably successful," she adds, "at being able to have a company grow by our instincts, as opposed to having to pay attention to the laws [that govern] how companies grow." Now, they realized, they needed to pay greater attention to those laws. [92]

John Virant, a youthful Harvard-educated lawyer, came to play a large role in Rounder's transition. Virant joined the company as an unpaid intern in the early 1990s. The founders soon offered him a salaried position as Rounder's first general counsel. In this role he took on much of the negotiating that had previously fallen to Nowlin. Leighton cites Virant's successful effort to secure the lucrative Raffi catalog for the label's Rounder Kids imprint as one of several projects that impressed the founders. "There are a lot of things like that that John helped bring about—things that people like [Ken, Bill, and I] might have lost patience with." In 1997 the previously insular threesome named Virant the label's president and chief executive officer, thus delegating an unprecedented level of authority to a relative outsider—authority that encompassed both day-to-day operations and long-range planning. Virant was a typically idiosyncratic choice. He had been a lawyer for only five years and his work at Rounder constituted the totality of his professional experience, both in law and in the record industry. He had proved himself to the founders, however, which was all that mattered. "We felt he was taking more of an active role in the company besides business affairs, so we thought it was a good next step," Leighton said at the time. "We think his ideas for Rounder and its

future are compatible with ours," she added. "We all feel that the way the record business is right now, John's skills and background are a good complement to ours. It is nice to have somebody help shoulder some of those responsibilities." Hinting at a new approach, Virant added, "For the last 27 years, everything has fallen on Ken, Bill and Marian. I think the idea is to rely on me more and move the company forward."[93]

In noting that everything had "fallen on" the founders in the past, Virant suggests that there were personal as well as business reasons for his promotion. Leighton appears to confirm this with her reference to the founders' diminishing patience and her expression of pleasure at the arrival of someone who could help "shoulder" responsibilities. In the eighties Leighton married blues musician and record producer Ron Levy, and she gave birth to a son in 1988. By 1997, with her marriage over, she was raising the child alone. Thereafter she began work toward her second Master's degree, in American Literature and Language through the Harvard Extension School. Nowlin, whose own son was born in 1990, felt "great relief" when Virant began handling the often-contentious union contract negotiations.[94] A devoted baseball historian, he has published several books on the sport since Virant took the company reins. Irwin spent part of the mid-nineties caring for an ill girlfriend, who eventually passed away due to ovarian cancer. Toward the end of the decade he married for the first time. Always more comfortable with music than business, he sees Virant's rise as an opportunity to spend more time working with artists. With each of the founders assuming significant outside responsibilities, it had been quite some time since they could comfortably devote 16 hours per day to the label. While they had able assistance over the years, they bore the weight of all major decisions and—without suggesting that they stopped paying

attention—it is not surprising that they desired a respite of sorts. Trusting Virant, they gave him the room he needed to make a difference.

As one of his first tasks Virant had to bring order to Rounder's unsettled distribution arrangements amidst the relatively new, corporate retail environment. This was the context in which he helped negotiate the distribution agreement with Mercury/Polygram that had so concerned Sing Out!'s Mark Moss. He also began to reshape the company's staff. One unplanned—though perhaps predictable—casualty of Virant's ascension was Duncan Browne, then holding the title of general manager. Browne was there when Virant joined Rounder and had urged his appointment as counsel. Now after 18 years, during which Browne developed more authority and autonomy than anyone other than the founders, he watched the newcomer rise to the top. He left within a year in the summer of 1998, assuming that to the founders he represented the past. Virant hired Polygram executive Paul Foley—a man with over two decades of industry experience—to fill the marketing position that Piver once held. Foley recruited Sheri Sands, a onetime Polygram co-worker with whom he was personally involved. Sands, who joined the company in June 1999, also had more than twenty years of industry experience. Foley was then promoted to general manager and Sands—only eight months after she arrived—assumed the vice-presidency of sales and marketing. Speaking in 2001 Virant discussed his determination to reshape the company through these and other new hires. "It's a balancing act," he said. "In building the strongest team at the label, I wanted a good mix between new hires and long-term employees. . . There have been music enthusiasts involved from the start, but the company needed more business-savvy employees to move to the next level."[95]

To the consternation of some employees, Virant's influence also extended to Rounder's music. Within a year of taking charge he created Zoe Records, a wholly-owned Rounder imprint dedicated to "exciting and innovative acts in independent rock." Zoe owes its existence to the value the founders placed on Virant. Worried that he might leave to work at a major label, they augmented his promotion with an offer to create an imprint designed specifically to provide an outlet for Virant's musical tastes. "We knew," says Nowlin, that there was other music "that he liked that wasn't just our kind of music. So it was a very conscious creation to accommodate other musical tastes." Virant named Zoe after his young daughter, and as his flagship artist he signed Juliana Hatfield. In the late eighties Hatfield had sung and written for the Blake Babies, which had modest success in collegiate rock circles. In the nineties she was a soloist with a cult following who, in the words of the All-Music Guide, "married her ringing hooks to sweet, lovelorn pop and startlingly honest confessional songs." Briefly, she seemed "primed to become a crossover success in the wake of the commercialization of alternative rock." That success never came and Hatfield remains a minor pop star with a vaguely alternative image. As Nowlin acknowledges readily, her music has absolutely nothing to do with Rounder's historical mission. Of her signing he says simply, "That's one of John's things."[96]

In the space of a single year Rounder instituted dramatic changes in management, entered an alliance with a major label and began a rock imprint. Collectively these changes fostered a period of internal turmoil that reflected the seemingly eternal divide between the sensibilities of art and commerce. Singer-songwriter Jennifer Truesdale Brogan, who resigned her position as national marketing coordinator in 2000 after nine years at the label, said, "What you're in danger of having is a group of business people,

not music people. That's my main fear. You can't sell indigenous Chinese classical music," she added, "the way you sell mainstream pop." Brad San Martin, a Berklee School of Music graduate and avowed bluegrass fanatic, met with Virant in 1999 while seeking to move from an unpaid internship to a salaried position on the company's promotion staff. Virant asked him to explain the difference between bluegrass and old-time music "because he didn't know," San Martin says, "which I found odd. He's supposed to be in charge, right?"[97]

Paul Foley became, in the words of the Boston Phoenix, "a lightning rod" for criticism. Shay Quillen, who worked in promotion for six years before leaving in 1999, describes him as a "suit," using the old stereotype applied to soulless corporate financiers. "He wanted to break someone big," says Quillen, who clearly believes that in Foley's hands this would mean the loss of Rounder's soul. One unhappy employee who wished to remain anonymous told the Phoenix derisively, "We call it Foley Records."[98] San Martin saw staffers "seething" about the personal relationship between Foley and Sands, which suggested favoritism to some. He ultimately concluded that the resentment was unfair and counterproductive. Foley, he says, is "a resourceful individual" with deep industry experience, who "understands the relationships necessary to market a successful release." Touching upon the stereotypical divide between commerce and art, or between head and heart, he adds, "[Foley] holds his cards close to his chest, while we wear our hearts on our sleeves. It's a personality clash as much as anything. If you meet him halfway, he's a good guy." The resentment was especially unfair to Sands, San Martin says. In addition to her "thorough background in retail and distribution," she is, he maintains, a likeable person and "a big music fan. She is passionate and devoted to it. She isn't . . . hungry for

every eccentric tidbit, but she loves the stuff. We've had long conversations about cool, off-kilter releases"—not old-time fiddle records, but not stereotypical major label pap either.[99]

The Phoenix reported plunging morale in an April 2000 article, which asked if Rounder was "going corporate" and claimed that "somewhere between seven and 10 long-time Rounder employees" had resigned in the past several months. Long-time vice-president Brad Paul, speaking in 2004, confirmed the staff upheaval. "There was a lot of turnover three to four years ago, when it seemed like every time I turned around, another face was leaving. Some left on their own, some didn't."[100] Resentment reached a peak in March 2000 when Foley fired Glenn Jones, the 23-year employee who served as union shop steward and had negotiated every one of Rounder's union contracts. At the time of his termination Jones was using company e-mail to circulate a draft letter objecting to the recent promotion of Sands. Foley learned of the draft and within six days Jones received three separate warnings of poor performance or violation of company rules—sufficient grounds for dismissal under the union contract. After consultation among Virant and the founders, Jones was terminated for misuse of the e-mail system, excessive tardiness and errors in the company catalog, which he edited. Jones argued that the firing was actually in retaliation for protected union activity and was an attempt to frighten activists and break the union. The founders maintained that not only were the stated grounds valid but that Jones had been an unduly disruptive influence for years, beyond the requirements of his union role. Jones initiated a formal grievance procedure in an effort to win reinstatement. While the matter was pending, however, the parties agreed to a confidential monetary settlement.[101]

To the founders the Jones affair momentarily and unfairly tarred the public image of a new management team they consider both highly qualified and essential to survival. Eventually the internal disarray calmed down. The staff stabilized with a mixture of old and new employees and everyone, Brad Paul says, is "on the same page."[102] Some employees, suggesting the union busting claims of a few years earlier, sought decertification of the union. The effort came to a vote in early 2004 and failed. Rounder remains a union shop. The distribution arrangement that Virant structured in 1998 has survived through the Universal Music Group, Polygram's corporate successor. It gives Universal a stake in the success of selected albums that have the potential to appeal to a reasonably sized niche-audience of the type that favors, for example, Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, Nanci Griffith or Alison Krauss. The distributor employs a thoroughly professional staff that works with both Rounder and retailers to promote these titles. It also handles the physical manufacture of the discs, ships them, provides store play copies and replenishes depleted stock. In 2004 Rounder's top retail accounts were all national chains—Barnes and Noble, Borders, Best Buy and Wal-Mart, with internet pioneer Amazon rounding out the top 5. The label could not market to these retailers, says Nowlin, by taking the approach it used with the "old Tower," which was staffed by music devotees eager to stock at least one of everything. These contemporary merchandisers, for good or ill, work more effectively with an entity such as Universal. Nowlin praises Sands—whom he calls a "brilliant" music promoter—and Foley for their ability to serve as crucial "translators" between Rounder's historical culture and the contemporary record industry.[103]

Universal distributes only certain Rounder albums, which Rounder designates. Given Universal's broad scope, Rounder generally does not ask it to handle albums that are projected to sell less than 7500 copies. It may make an exception for a touring artist with the potential to build an audience but that is rare. Rounder does not want to strain the relationship by pushing obviously poor sellers through the major label distribution system. While 7500 units is an extraordinarily low threshold where major labels are concerned, it is historically higher than the sales enjoyed by much of Rounder's inventory. Albums expected to sell below this threshold are distributed through several respected independents. While these smaller distribution firms continue to thrive, they have neither the financial wherewithal of Universal nor the leverage afforded by the larger firm's major label catalogs. Much of the music that once formed Rounder's heart goes through independent distribution. This includes Cajun music other than that of Steve Riley, old-time musicians Bruce Molsky and Dirk Powell and all of Mark Wilson's output. These and other projected small sellers are among projects assigned to an imprint called Rounder Select. With little or no promotional money available, Mark Wilson has referred to albums placed with this division as "selected for oblivion." Nowlin acknowledges this as a concern, but stresses that placing a niche album with a willing distributor geared to such product affords it better treatment than placement with an uninterested Universal.[104]

Zoe Records, the middle-of-the-road rock imprint Virant began in 1998, seems tailor made for a major label distributor that wants—with relatively little risk—to embrace contemporary pop and rock that appeals to those suddenly sought-after consumers who are over the age of 25. Better known signings include Cowboy Junkies, a

critics' favorite that emerged in the eighties with an ethereal, vaguely country-tinged sound and Lisa Loeb, a pop songwriter who had previously placed tunes on the soundtracks to mainstream films such as Reality Bites and Legally Blonde. In 2003 the release of Failer by the young Canadian Kathleen Edwards prompted an outpouring of critical praise, much of which compared her to rocker Sheryl Crow and country/folk favorite Lucinda Williams. Critic Michael D. Clark offered a fairly typical observation in noting that Edwards mixed "arena guitars and lap steel with country twang and punkish moans." Zoe has also entered the DVD market, releasing among other things a disc featuring contemporary concert footage of seventies star Boz Scaggs singing his greatest hits. Among the imprint's odder releases is Rush in Rio, a DVD of the once popular hard rock trio whose lyrics display a penchant for science fiction and fantasy themes. A classic rock band for the trailing edge of the baby boom, Rush was Virant's favorite group when he was growing up. While it prompted a good deal of discussion, skeptical founders deferred to their CEO's passion. "No way," says Nowlin, when asked if any of the founders would have conceived of such a project, adding that he "couldn't name a single song on the thing." Mainstream hard rock, however, has its advantages. The label budgeted Rush in Rio to break even if 35,000 units sold. By late 2004 sales had exceeded 200,000, making it among Rounder's most successful offerings.[105]

Whether or not one enjoys Zoe's artistic direction, it is clear that the imprint's music bears little relation to that which made its parent label unique. It remains to be seen whether the Zoe aesthetic is a harbinger of an entirely new direction for Rounder or something that merely supplements and—as the founders stress—financially assists a continued focus on vernacular sounds in a tough retail climate. Mark Moss feared in 1998

that the Polygram—now the Universal—arrangement could spell the end of the small-selling traditional records that Rounder had once championed. The virtually simultaneous creation of Zoe underscored that concern. In 2004 Zoe released 26 CDs and DVDs out of Rounder's total output of 96 releases. While that reflects a growing percentage of Zoe music, Rounder is hewing to its original mission to a considerable degree. In part it is accomplishing this through the extensive use of anthologies that repackage music released previously by the label. For example, in 2001, in conjunction with its ongoing thirtieth-anniversary celebration, Rounder planned a compendium of female bluegrass artists who had recorded for the label over the years. Witnessing O Brother's steadily rising sales, Rounder christened the release O Sister! The Women's Bluegrass Collection and designed sepia-tinged cover art that mimicked that of the successful soundtrack. Initially the label hoped the anthology would sell 15,000 copies. However as the O Brother phenomenon hung on, Rounder increased this projection to 50,000 units. By late 2004 the album had sold approximately 150,000 copies, representing roughly one million dollars in revenue—a superlative result for a bluegrass album.[106]

Repackaging is nothing new in the record industry and Rounder has repackaged its own material for some time. Reissues may be particularly desirable in the case of a label with Rounder's unique heritage. Due to the founders' eclecticism, their aggressive release schedule and their heavy focus on active performers, Rounder's back catalog is one of the pre-eminent sites of recorded vernacular music created by musicians active in the final third of the twentieth century. In the mid-nineties, hoping to weather tough times and keep its music in stores, the label began a line of low-priced collections under the heading Easydisc, which summarize the work of a single artist or an entire genre.

Easydiscs are marked by generic readily identifiable packaging. Rounder uses the line to target novice fans who shop at mass-merchandisers such as Wal-Mart or Kmart.[107] Presently there are approximately 90 Easydiscs. While a few of these consist of newly released material, most are distilled from prior label offerings. Apart from the Easydisc line, the success of O Sister prompted Rounder to release a string of bluegrass and old-time anthologies—ten in 2002 alone—each containing previously issued material. These include collections devoted to, among other things, gospel bluegrass, bluegrass versions of well-known pop and rock songs and bluegrass paeans to motherhood. In conjunction with its thirtieth anniversary, Rounder inaugurated its "Heritage Series." Like most Easydiscs, albums in this grouping consist of music drawn from the label's back catalog, chosen to represent either a genre or a specific artist. Among these are single-disc surveys of old-time fiddle music, Cajun music, zydeco, blues and singer-songwriters. Unlike the Easydiscs, these contain beautiful artwork and copious notes, appropriate to the celebratory nature of the anniversary sales pitch.

Repackaging requires a delicate balance. Reductive in nature, anthologies run the risk of constraining an artist or genre in an artificial manner. For listeners who wish to explore in depth, compilations often fail to present the failures, the regressions or the stylistic oddities that illustrate the truly winding course of artistic or cultural development. In practical terms, however, repackaging may be the only way to keep certain artists or styles in the stores. Retailers are quick to jettison older material, especially if an artist is no longer active or was never a commercial success. A well-packaged compilation offering an appealing theme, contemporary art work and detailed liner notes is more likely to attract the attention of both retailers and music journalists

than the straight reissue of an old album. It can thus help keep an artist or style before the public. Few retailers would stock separate CD reissues of Rounder's three LPs by the Highwoods String Band. However, a single disc compilation with historical notes found a place in some stores. A quality anthology can help the inexperienced or financially challenged musical adventurer determine where to begin an artistic exploration. It provides an entry point allowing relatively inexpensive access to a variety of artists, with the possibility of more specific exploration at a later time. With respect to old-time music and bluegrass, Irwin argues that O Brother created a once-in-a-lifetime level of visibility. For those music fans who want to hear more, Rounder's ability to re-release material fairly rapidly places a variety of quality music in the hands of consumers at a moment of peak interest.[108]

Not all anthologies are designed to capitalize upon or re-introduce marketable musical genres. Some projects will never generate much revenue and their existence evidences a continued desire to preserve eclectic non-commercial music. In 1997, to considerable media fanfare, Rounder began issuing "The Alan Lomax Collection," consisting of field recordings from around the globe that the legendary music hunter made from the 1930s through the 1960s. The Library of Congress and some commercial companies, including Rounder, had issued a small amount of this material previously but most of that was out-of-print. Of a once-projected 140 CDs, Rounder has released 84 through 2004. Recent discs feature music from Spain, Italy, Scotland and the Caribbean. The Collection's early media campaign involved the retention of an outside publicist. While promotional efforts have since waxed and waned, Rounder continues focused marketing of the project, with a particular emphasis on libraries. Rounder also pursues

other, similar projects. In 2003, as part of a still-small series marketed as the Anthology of World Music, the company issued separate albums of religious vocal music from Lebanon, a collection of music from Azerbaijan and a timely anthology of Afghan music. That same year the label issued collections from the Saharawis people of the western Sahara, a Turkish anthology spanning the first half of the twentieth century and the second in a projected series of albums drawn from the 1939 Haitian field work of anthropologists Melville and Frances Herskovitz.

Release of this cultural treasure trove is important, but the test of whether Rounder remains a vital presenter of vernacular expression depends on the extent to which it continues to release music by musicians currently active. By the year 2000 its early models, Folkways and Arhoolie, had turned into musical museums, largely content to reissue older material on CD. The former, under the name Smithsonian Folkways, is now attempting to again play a contemporary role. Rounder has never stopped issuing current material, though its commercial standards have changed. In the beginning it issued what it liked, ignoring commercial considerations entirely. Beneficiaries of that approach include George Pegram, The Spark Gap Wonder Boys and the two women's liberation rock bands. Today these performers would be unlikely to find an outlet at Rounder. The Rounders began with an anti-profit stance. They then concluded they could justify a release only if they expected to break even. Speaking at the Folk Alliance conference in 1998, Irwin said that breaking even was no longer sufficient, unless it involved a "special" project that is "folklorically important," citing as examples the Lomax collection and the CD reissues of fiddler Ed Haley's collected works.[109]

Today, when he ponders the signing of a contemporary performer, Irwin evaluates more than music. He wants to know whether an artist has the business sense needed to succeed in a competitive professional environment or the commitment to learn. He considers whether an artist is willing to tour, to work with an agent, to meet with the press, and to handle these functions in a responsible manner. In considering the wealth of material submitted to Rounder by hopeful musicians, he evaluates everything from the packaging of their homemade audition CDs to the quality of their press packets. Though this material is all likely to change if an artist is signed, he nonetheless notices whether artists strive to present themselves from the outset in a professional manner. Such considerations, he now believes, are necessary if the music is to have any chance of gaining a hearing in a crowded, competitive marketplace.[110]

Popular tastes—scaled to the limitations of the roots music world—now influence the Rounder release schedule. Leighton, speaking in 2003, noted that from a commercial standpoint "this is a really awful time for the blues."[111] Activity at Rounder's Bullseye Blues imprint reflects this—with only eight albums released between 2001 and 2003 and none in 2004. Rounder's once overwhelming role in the recording of Cajun music and zydeco has declined considerably, as those genres experience commercial doldrums. There remain a great many vernacular artists, however, who survive the commercial winnowing process. In the economically distressed field of Cajun music, for example, the hard-touring Mamou Playboys continue to record for Rounder. The Magnolia Sisters, a traditionally-based acoustic Cajun quartet, released their second Rounder CD in 2004. In the first years of the twenty-first century a random selection of Rounder releases by currently active vernacular artists includes albums from young bluegrass traditionalists

Open Road, as well as separate bluegrass albums from fiddler Michael Cleveland, Dobroist Rob Ickes and the widely-heralded singer James King, whom the label brought to roots music prominence in the 1990s. Other contemporary material came from old-time music performers Dirk Powell, Bruce Molsky and the husband-wife team of Ginny Hawker and Tracy Schwarz . Country honky-tonker Heather Myles released an album, as did acoustic bluesman Corey Harris, conjunto master Mingo Saldivar and Cape Breton fiddler Natalie MacMaster, a major draw on the festival circuit. Mark Wilson, Rounder's longtime advocate of deep tradition, produced an album by Cape Breton fiddler and singer Donald MacLellan. Wilson, ever the crusader for a deeper understanding of vernacular expression, hopes this album will help cut through the "balderdash [that] has been promoted under the heading of 'Celtic music.'" Rounder stalwart Jimmy Sturr, a Grammy-winning star of the polka circuit, has released a new album each year between 1994 and 2004.[112]

The digital revolution may help assuage Moss's fears about the continued availability of Rounder's back catalog. Though George Pegram's album, along with many others from the label's early days, is available on CD the absence of retail shelf space is a concern. Consumers can obtain that disc through Amazon or Rounder's own website. Moreover, much of the digitized portion of the Rounder catalog—including Pegram's record—is available through iTunes, Apple Computer's music download store. In 2005 the label plans to inaugurate "The Rounder Archive," a download service offering albums, old and new, that can no longer be marketed economically in physical form. As presently planned, consumers will be able to download both music and notes. Those who wish to order a custom made physical CD with printed notes will be able to do so at a

higher cost. The Rounders, still avid preservationists, are excited about the possibility of finally being able to release some of their more esoteric older albums. Citing the Snuffy and Pappy records and a Clark Kessinger fiddle album, all dating from the label's earliest years, Nowlin says, "we always felt bad about . . . albums that we really loved but can't figure out a way to possibly sell right now. Maybe," he adds, "[digital downloading] is a way." Discussing the project, Irwin suggests his distress about the record industry's more confining economic realities. "When we started out, we resented the major labels who owned the Charlie Poole, Gid Tanner, Monroe Brothers, etc., masters and wouldn't put out the material." Now, he adds, "we find that we've been doing the same and of course we have a better understanding of why they didn't do so back then." Downloading, he hopes, will offer "a way in which we can make material available in a cost effective way but still with quality intact."[113]

Commentators who imply that Rounder was a relatively static cottage industry for 25 or 30 years before suddenly "going corporate" do not understand the label's history. Rounder began as an idealized romantic adventure but its founders quickly realized that they needed to master business fundamentals if they wanted people to hear their records. In crucial respects it was artists—northern hippies and southern authentics alike—who insisted on change. These artists embraced the medium of records because they wanted to reach the public and, in most cases, earn a living. They expected the owners of their record company to help them achieve these goals by using the tools available to savvy business people. Every step forward the Rounders have taken has been in furtherance of their continued desire to produce and sell an eclectic array of music. Viewed in this light, the sales tables at festivals, the initial distribution efforts, the embrace of professional

marketing strategies, the installation of a new generation of management, the alliance with Universal, the creation of Zoe Records and the move toward digital downloading have all been of a piece. Each step has helped foster the creation and dissemination of an eclectic array of vernacular music unlike anything that anyone else has produced. Folkways never embraced commercial reality to the same degree and it withered on the vine. Elektra went pop and stopped producing tradition-based music. Arhoolie has produced a stunning array of vernacular music but has only rarely managed to support the financial aspirations of working performers. Post-boom roots labels have been content to occupy tiny niches. Alligator, founded in 1971, has produced roughly 200 blues albums but confines itself to that genre. Red House, begun in the mid-1980s, specializes in contemporary singer-songwriters. Only Rounder, with roughly 3000 releases, embraces the music of the world, the amateur as well as the professional.

Rounder is a labor of love that would not have existed but for the romantic yearnings of Irwin, Nowlin and Leighton, who desired passionately to touch worlds other than their own. Its story encompasses their strong drive and their human imperfection. John Virant and his management team now tend to grand business strategies and mundane details. They act, however, in the context of the art that the founders choose to embrace. Once a week the founders join Billington, Virant and a few other staffers to make decisions regarding Rounder's artists—current and potential—and their albums. They discuss who to sign and what to release. Nowlin says it is the one meeting he tries never to miss. The founders show great deference to Virant whom they clearly admire and respect. They claim, however, that they maintain the final say about the company's overall artistic balance. Neither Foley nor Sands attend these meetings. Their jobs are to

supervise staff and to sell, not to offer first words about the label's artistic identity.[114] The founders' ongoing involvement in creativity is a primary reason that Rounder has attained a position of unique importance in American culture. With respect to the label's enormous existing catalog, that position is secure. The unanswered question about the legacy of Rounder Records is whether the label will continue to be uniquely important once its founders leave the scene.

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[6] Damian Cave, "Inside Clear Channel," Rolling Stone, 13 August 2004, online edition at < http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/_/id/6432174> (accessed 7 March 2005).

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[12] kammac, "FCC emergency," FOLKD-L, 14 May, 2003, (accessed 7 March 2005).

[13] Rik Palieri, "my station is off the air forever," FOLKDJ-L, 22 May 2003 (accessed 7 March 2005).

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[15] Mark Moss, "FCC, Media Mergers & Mike," FOLKDJ-L, 22 May 2003 (accessed 7 March 2005).

[16] Ken Irwin (D), interview by author. Irwin stresses that he did not malign Mercury executives as "suits" but he recognized that others did, and he knew that promotional efforts needed to take this reality into account.

[17] "Old-Time Music Is Very Much Alive," liner notes to the audio recording O Brother, Where Art Thou?, Mercury Records 088 170-069-2; Michelle Nikolai, "Way Out of Tune," Nashville Scene, 14 June 2001.

[18] Ken Irwin, "O Brother/AK+US," BGRASS-L, 22 August 2001 (accessed 7 March 2005).

[19] Ken Irwin, "O Brother," BGRASS-L, 26 September 2001 (accessed 7 March 2005).

[20] Brian Mansfield, "No soggy bottom for these songs," USA Today, 9 March 2001, Section E, page 1; Shoshana Berger, "O chartbuster, how did thou happen?" MSNBC: Entertainment and Media, 4 April 2001, online at <http://www.msnbc.com:80/ news/554760.asp?cp1=1#BODY> (accessed 6 April 2001, printout in possession of author); David Hinckley, "'O Brother' act hits the big time," New York Daily News, 13 June 2001; Neil Strauss, "The Country Music Country Radio Ignores," New York Times, national ed., 24 March 2001, AR 1, 31.

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[52] Nowlin (A), interview by author.

[53] Each of the Rounders discussed their early road trips throughout my interviews with them, in various contexts; also, Alan Jabbour, interview by author. The reference to "hippie radicals" is from Irwin (A), interview by author.

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[58] Irwin (C), interview by author. The quote is from Irwin, e-mail to author, 5 February 2005.

[59] Irwin (C), interview by author. On Takoma's history, see Takoma, on line at < http:// www.fantasyjazz.com/html/anniversary_takoma.html (accessed 9 March 2005).

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[61] Pete Wernick, letter to Rounder dated "Sept. 5" in possession of author, located in a Rounder file folder marked "Country Cooking." Flying Fish Records released the third Country Cooking album in 1976, suggesting that Wernick wrote his letter in September 1975. Wernick does not recall the incident. Each of the Rounders told a story similar to this incident in my interviews with them in June 1999. Though no one could recall the artist involved, Nowlin named Wernick as a possibility.

[62] Though some use the term "Dobro" generically to refer to all resonator guitars, it is a registered trademark owned by Gibson Musical Instruments and refers only to Gibson's brand of resonator guitar.

[63] Letter of June 3, 1974 containing the salutation "Dear Rounder" and signed "Tut." Undated letter to Tut Taylor signed "Ken for Rounder." Copies of each are in the author's possession, discovered in a Rounder file folder maintained in connection with the audio recording Tut Taylor, Friar Tut, Rounder Records 0011.

[64] Irwin, Nowlin and Leighton, interviews with author in June and October 1999.

[65] Nowlin (C), interview by author. Rounder later purchased Flying Fish Records.

[66] Bill Kornrich, interview by author.

[67]Ibid.; Nowlin (C), interview by author; Dan Wilson, e-mails to author, 25 and 27 October 2004 and 8 November 2004.

[68] The unidentified employee made these remarks in an e-mail to the author dated 26 September 2002, but did not wish to discuss the company for attribution.

[69] Stampfel, interview by author. Each of the Rounders remembered his advice and its significance to them.

[70] Billington, interview by author; Jones, interview by author.

[71] Billington, interview by author; Jones, interview by author.

[72] Billington, interview by author; Nowlin (C), interview by author.

[73] Irwin, e-mail to author dated 4 February 2005, incorporating a Berardini e-mail to Irwin.

[74] Irwin, e-mail to author dated 4 February 2005. The memo quoted is addressed to "k" and dated "12-30-77." A copy is in the author's possession, provided by Irwin. Though it is unsigned, circumstances suggest that Leighton wrote it.

[75] Duncan Browne and Susan Piver, interview by author. Piver, now married to Browne, worked at Rounder as Vice President of Sales and Marketing from 1992 until 1996.

[76] Nathan Cobb, "Easy Rounder," Boston Globe Magazine, 20 August 1989, 22; Deborah Russell, "Rounder, Rykodisc Merging Their Indie Distrib Firms," Billboard, 9 May 1992, 10, 95.

[77] Gary Susman, "Silver and gold," photocopy of an otherwise unidentified article appearing in a Rounder corporate promotion packet, prepared in conjunction with the label's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1995, in author's possession.

[78] Scott Alarik, "Rounder Records' 20th Anniversary," Sing Out!, Fall 1990, 24, 27.

[79] Irwin (C), interview with author, discussing the New Orleans distributor; Browne quoted in Deborah Russell, "Grass Route: Rounder still looking to close House deal," Billboard, 27 July 1991, 36. On the House acquisition, see also Deborah Russell, "Grass Route," Billboard, 7 December 1991, 49.

[80] Deborah Russell, "Independent Distributors Building National Networks," Billboard 22 February 1992, 1, passim.

[81] Nowlin (C), interview by author, explaining Rounder's varied distribution companies. The closing Nowlin quotation is from Ed Christman, "Valley, Rounder Form Unusual Partnership," Billboard, 21 May 1994, 48.

[82] Piver, interview by author.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Information drawn from Piver, interview by author and Irwin (C), interview by author. For peak chart performance by Krauss's single and album, respectively, see "Hot Country Singles and Tracks," Billboard, 10 June 1995, 28 and "Top Country Albums," Billboard, 17 June 1995, 31.

[85] Brad Paul, e-mail to Irwin, 23 December 2004. Irwin forwarded it to the author.

[86] Through an entity called Rounder Kids, the label still distributes children's music.

[87] Nowlin (C), interview by author; Leighton (B), interview by author.

[88] Piver, interview by author.

[89] Ed Christman, "Worsening Retail Conditions Finally Arrive At Label's Door," Billboard, 10 February 1996, 58.

[90] Nowlin (C), interview by author.

[91] Leighton (A), interview by author.

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[93] Leighton and Virant quoted in Chris Morris, "Rounder Taps Virant as 1st President/CEO," Billboard, 1 November 1997, 65.

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[95] Browne, interview by author; Rounder's personnel changes summarized in Michelle Chihara, "Reeling at Rounder: Is Cambridge's Pet Indie Label Going Corporate?" Boston Phoenix, 27 April 2000, online edition at <http://www.bostonphoenix.com/archive/features/00/04/27/rounder%5F records.html> (accessed 8 March 2005); Virant quoted in Richard Henderson, "30 Years Of Loving Music: A Label Based On Traditional Values," Billboard, 10 February 2001, 18, 26.

[96] The Zoe description is from Rounder's website at <rounder.com> (accessed 8 March 2005); Nowlin (C), interview, by author; the Hatfield commentary is from the All-Music Guide, online at <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll> (accessed 8 March 2005).

[97] Brogan quoted in Chihara, "Reeling at Rounder;" San Martin, e-mail to author, 13 October 2002.

[98] Chihara, "Reeling at Rounder;" Shay Quillen, interview by author.

[99] San Martin, e-mail to author, October 13, 2002.

[100] Chihara, "Reeling at Rounder;" Paul quoted in Morse, "Godsmack on Rounder?"

[101] On the Jones termination: Jones, interview by author; Nowlin (C), interview by author; Irwin (C), interview by author; Chihara, "Reeling at Rounder;" Chris Morris, "Dismissal at Rounder Records Turns Into An Employee/Management Issue," Billboard, 13 May 2000, 127.

[102] Morse, "Godsmack on Rounder?"

[103] Nowlin (C), interview by author.

[104] Irwin (C), interview by author; Nowlin (C), interview by author; Wilson, interview by author.

[105] Nowlin (C), interview by author; Michael D. Clark, "Beginner's Pluck: Kathleen Edwards breaks new ground with debut album," Houston Chronicle, 17 January 2003, online at <http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/ae/music/albums/1739779> (accessed 8 March 2005).

[106] Nowlin (C), interview by author.

[107] "Notes From 4/13/96 Meeting With Jimmy," an unsigned internal Rounder memorandum concerning polka artist Jimmy Sturr, in possession of author.

[108] Irwin (C), interview by author.

[109] Irwin, speaking at "Record Labels," 11 February 1998, a panel discussion at the 10th Annual International Folk Alliance Conference, Memphis, TN. A tape recording of the discussion is in the author's possession.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ted Drozdowski, "Getting the Blues," Boston Magazine, February 2003, online at

<http://www.bostonmagazine.com/ArticleDisplay.php?id=203> (accessed 8 March 2005).

[112] Website notes to the audio recording Donald MacLellan, The Dusky Meadow, Rounder CD 7044, online at <http://www.rounder.com/ index.php?id =album.php& catalog_id=6456> (accessed 8 March 2005).

[113] Nowlin (C), interview by author; Irwin, "More Positive Ideas for Record Labels," IBMA-L, 23 June 2004 (accessed 8 March 2005).

[114] Nowlin (C), interview by author.

10

GONE TO THE INTERNET, EVERYONE
A Conclusion

In the spring of 2003 Christopher Guest's film A Mighty Wind offered a humorous but fond look back at the days of the great boom. Presented as a mock documentary, this cinematic roman à clef pokes gentle fun at some of the more whitewashed commercial performers who were successful back in the days when ersatz folk music dominated popular entertainment. It satirizes, in the perceptive words of critic Richard Corliss, "their worthy aims, their solemn self-absorption, their belief that the popular form of folk music ever mattered, or still might."[1] The film ignores virtually every element of the boom in its focus on high-energy Kingston Trio clones and overly romanticized pseudo-balladry. It presents neither serious folksong scholarship nor old-time music, bluegrass or blues. It contains nary a hint of leftwing politics. In short, the film presents the quintessentially one-dimensional view of the folk phenomenon that staunch revivalists have always loathed. As best I could determine, with my ear reasonably close to the ground, folk fans loved it. At the least, a clear majority of vocal folk fans who posted their comments on various internet discussion lists loved it. Dissenting voices generally claimed that it was simply not funny enough.

A Mighty Wind prompted a discussion thread on FOLKDJ-L entitled "Pin-striped shirts & Hootenanny." Participants embraced the oft-maligned Kingston Trio and their commercializing contemporaries with a fervor never displayed in Greenwich Village circa 1963. Ardent traditionalists and fans of singer-songwriters alike sang the trio's praises. The disc jockey who initiated the thread—an individual born too late to have

enjoyed the boom in its heyday—offered this cogent observation of the trio's folk-era albums: "Well, take a listen. Simple three part harmonies and simple instrumentation. Today we have artists that are considered 'folk' that plug in more instruments and create sounds in a studio with overdubs, loops and computers to mix them. So can someone explain what 'commercial folk' means?" Another correspondent, speaking of the folk/pop albums of the fifties and sixties generally, observed "there's more actual folk content there (i.e., actual traditional folksongs) than on a lot of the singer-songwriter albums of today that show no traditional influences at all . . ." No less a personage than Bob Dylan has confessed that he too enjoyed the trio. "I liked The Kingston Trio," he writes. "Even though their style was polished and collegiate, I like most of their stuff anyway."[2]

The contemporary revivalist's acceptance of the film and the trio stems in part from a desire to avoid the image of "solemn self-absorption" that Corliss astutely, albeit gently, mocks. Folk fans understand that their long insistence upon playing music "right," along with popular caricatures of stern "protest singers," has led to the perception that they are a particularly humorless crowd. They need to show that they can laugh at themselves. Another factor contributing to the film's acceptance is the distance between the great boom and contemporary practice. It has been several decades since The Kingston Trio "threatened" an idealized folk heritage. In the intervening years countless musicians, many of whom acknowledge they first heard banjos and folksongs through The Kingston Trio, have tried to play traditional rural music "right." That traditional heritage, or at least the revivalist's simulacrum of it, has survived. The passage of time has also helped place the trio's role in perspective. In the sixties they appeared to be a dominant force, which pushed aside "worthier" efforts. Decades later, revivalists

understand that the trio's perceived dominance lasted for only a brief moment within a movement that has endured for more than 150 years. In context, they were important but hardly dominant. Revivalists have also come to a greater acceptance of the salutary role that commerce can play in the preservation, dissemination and creation of heritage. The trio's commercialism no longer appears to be an unregenerate evil. In short, as a result of enhanced understanding and a contemporary tendency toward factional reconciliation, the revival's more traditional elements have forgiven the trespasses of The Kingston Trio.

The Folk Alliance has been one factor in this tendency toward reconciliation. Elaine and Clark Weissman believed correctly that an organization that brought people together regularly could help heal divisions. As a computer scientist Clark was aware of the incipient internet at an early stage. He and Elaine invited Phyllis Barney to the founding Alliance conference in Malibu in 1989 because she ran an electronic bulletin board that publicized folk music events nationally. Once there Barney attempted to discuss the computer's potential as a communication aid, but only Clark seemed to understand her. At the Philadelphia conference the following year she offered a workshop on computer use. Only eight people attended, including Clark. Shortly thereafter Barney became the president of the Alliance's board of directors and then the organization's first executive director. She continued to encourage the use of computers for communication. The Alliance had been presenting computer workshops for several years when the internet and the web became pervasive modes of communication, allowing people everywhere to communicate with one another instantaneously and en masse. By that time many Alliance members were knowledgeable computer users. They ran conference panels that educated members about websites, e-mail and listservs. Folk music disc

jockey Tina Hay proposed the creation of FOLKDJ-L at an Alliance conference, where she gathered an initial subscriber list.[3]

Revivalists, like people involved in virtually every interest group imaginable, now communicate incessantly through a broad array of listservs and bulletin boards. Advice, information and philosophical debate flow freely and generally without undue antagonism. Appalachian fiddle fans have conversations with singer-songwriters and Kingston Trio buffs and the result is a new level of communication and understanding. The web contains an array of information encompassing every imaginable aspect of revivalism. The Rounder founders began their label in part because just a few years after the boom they could not locate many of the records they most enjoyed. Visitors to the honkingduck website can now download, without charge, complete versions of over 700 recordings made from the 1920s to the 1940s. The available musical categories include "early country music, string bands, dance calls, sacred harp, skits, ballads, popular songs, etc." The Mudcat Cafe, also without charge, offers printed lyrics to over 9000 traditional and contemporary folksongs. Participants regularly add new lyrics to the collection.[4] The lyrics to many Child Ballads, along with sound samples of the tunes, are available for free through a comprehensive website dedicated to the folk music of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and the United States.[5]

Digital technology has also revolutionized both the recording process and the dissemination of recorded music. Musicians in all genres now make quality records using readily available software, which they sell through on-line stores or their own websites. Consumers who do not require a physical CD simply download their purchase. This has resulted in an explosion of opportunity for musicians and fans alike. The profusion of

self-made CDs has been so vast that, predictably, a sympathetic entrepreneur has devised an artist-friendly, for-profit marketing system. Derek Stivers, the creator and owner of CD Baby, is a "Rounder founder" for the twenty-first century. As an unknown musician in the mid-nineties, Stivers sold approximately 1500 copies of his own, self-manufactured CD. He did this primarily through direct contact with fans at performances. He wanted distribution, however, and could not get it. In 1997 he established his own on-line store after asking a few musician friends if he could sell their recordings along with his own.[6]

Stivers is a personable and low-key self-promoter and musicians have embraced his business model. He serves musicians working in any genre provided they are "independent," which he defines—in typical "art vs. commerce" fashion—as "not having sold one's life, career, and creative works over to a corporation." He will stock as few as five CDs from a single artist in return for a one-time charge, set at $35.00 at the end of 2004. Artists establish their own retail prices. Stivers charges a flat-fee per CD sold and guarantees that the artist will be paid within a week of every sale, even if that requires payment for only a single CD. Every day on which CD Baby sells a CD it sends an e-mail to the artist that provides the name and address of the purchaser. For no additional fee his "store" provides an advertising page with whatever text the artist desires, links to the artist's own website and sound samples. As of early 2005 Stivers, now assisted by a paid staff, claims to have sold 1.3 million CDs for 85,000 artists, to whom he has paid 12.6 million dollars. Judging from extensive discussion on FOLKDJ-L and FOLKBIZ, musicians love cdbaby, which has maintained a reputation for integrity. One CD Baby feature that attracts artists and consumers alike is the organization of the "store," where

Stivers demonstrates a good understanding of the practical subdivisions of the various genres offered. The "folk" section has a "traditional" category. For singer-songwriter fans, however, it offers further refinement, with labels such as "gentle" or "angry" or "political" or—revealing a keen sense of revival history—"like Joni."

Folk radio has responded favorably to the proliferation of self-made CDs. Some DJs acknowledge they offer more airtime to artists on established labels such as Rounder, largely because they do not have the time to sample unfamiliar music nor the space to store the overwhelming number of self-made CDs that musicians provide. They use record labels as filters that ensure a reasonable level of musical and technological quality. The majority of DJs, however—at least as indicated by discussion on FOLKDJ—maintain that the cultivation of independent musicians is part of their mission and their responsibility. A typical correspondent said, "I take pride in the number of small and privately-produced labels I play. Independent stations should definitely support independent musicians."[7] In the context of the discussion, the reference to a "privately produced" label referred to a self-recorded and self-manufactured CD. Acknowledging the phenomenon of self-made CDs, Rounder's Nowlin says that many ambitious artists today make a reasonable choice in deciding to forego contracts with established labels such as his own. Those who do not wish to tour heavily or who do not want to enmesh themselves in promotional efforts may be better off, he says, selling CDs at shows and on the web. That is also true for any artist whose sales expectations cannot justify the costs taken by labels, distributors and retailers. This means that Rounder as it existed in the early 1970s would be unnecessary today. Little known musicians using contemporary

technology can record and market their own CDs and quite often make more money than they would with a record contract.[8]

Tom Neff, a Folk Alliance activist and astute commentator on the scene, predicts that the digital revolution is facilitating an "emerging renaissance in personal music making." Neff runs Grassy Hill Radio, a free service that streams folk music—of every imaginable type—over the internet 24 hours per day, seven days per week. He welcomes submissions from unknown artists. "Sitting here at my desk," he writes, "with nothing more than the Internet, a sound card, a CD-R and a printer, I can produce and distribute high fidelity music, press it, print it, and stream it to the world." Neff forecasts decades of warfare involving intellectual property rights and technological freedom. In the end, however, he sees "the piecemeal destruction" of a "commercial house of cards" that is now struggling to retain control of the recording and distribution of music. "People can take their ideas straight to MP3 and the world, and you and I can hear them, and that, my friends, will revive [the] folk process." What advocates must remember in the meantime, he stresses, "is that folk wins. Folk will win. Music will win."[9]

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[1] Richard, Corliss, "That Old Feeling: Get Along Little Folkie." Time.com, 21 April 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/columnist/corliss/article/0,9565,445267,00.html> (accessed 24 February 2005).

[2] "Well, take a listen:" Ron Olesko, "Pin-striped shirts & Hootenanny," FOLKDJ-L, 15 April 2003 (accessed 24 February 2005); " . . . there's more actual folk:" Bob Blackman, "Pin-striped shirts & Hootenanny," FOLKDJ-L, 16 April 2003 (accessed 24 February 2005); Bob Dylan, Chronicles: Volume One (New York: Simon Schuster, 2004), 32-33.

[3] Phyllis Barney, interview by author.

[4] honkingduck at <honkingduck.com> (accessed 24 February 2005). Mudcat Cafe at <http://www.mudcat.org> (accessed 24 February 2005). Readers can find lyrics by

searching Mudcat's Digital Tradition Database ("DT") using the search function located on Mudcat's homepage.

[5] Folk Music Of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and America at <http://www.contemplator.com/folk.html> (accessed 24 February 2005).

[6] CD Baby is found on the web at <cdbaby.com> (accessed 24 February 2005). Information about CD Baby in this and the following paragraph is taken from the company website and Stivers' remarks while serving on a panel entitled "Changing Face of Distribution" at the 2004 Folk Alliance conference.

[7] Larry Hoyt, "Artists on Labels vs. Truly Indie Artists," FOLKDJ-L, 2 February 2005, with responses of the same date (accessed 24 February 2005)."I take pride:" Mike Kelsey, "labels and such," FOLKDJ-L, 2 February 2005 (accessed 24 February 2005).

[8] Bill Nowlin (C), interview by author.

[9] Tom Neff, "Intellectual Property Wars," FOLKDJ-L, 17 February 2000 (accessed 24 February 2005).

Note On Citations

A. Interviews

All of the interviews I cite in this dissertation are listed below. I also list additional interviews that I did not incorporate into the manuscript but which enhanced my understanding of my subject. I conducted all interviews personally via telephone, unless the list specifies a location. In such cases, the interview took place in person at that location. Tape recordings of all interviews are in my possession, except as specified.

I interviewed Ken Irwin, Bill Nowlin and Marian Leighton—the founders of Rounder Records—over the course of several meetings and phone conversations. I am indebted to Lara Pellegrinelli who, as a Harvard University graduate student, also interviewed Irwin, Nowlin and Leighton. Ms. Pellegrinelli provided me with copies of her transcripts and allowed me to quote from them. In notes, I distinguish my interview sessions from one another, and from those of Ms. Pellegrinelli, by parenthetical alphabetic notations, as shown below.

Ahrens, Pat—August 30, 2002

Balderose, George—December 8, 1999

Barney, Phyllis—May 8, 2000—Washington, DC

Billington, Scott—October 15, 1999—Cambridge, MA

Blaine, Anne—January 21, 2000

Blevin, Margo—February 16, 2000

Brand, Oscar—March 9, 1992—Port Washington, NY

Broderick, Bing—October 14, 1999—Cambridge, MA

Browne, Duncan—October 8, 2000 (interviewed jointly with his wife, Susan Piver)

Cohen, Robert—December 6, 1999 (interviewed jointly with his wife, Dianne Tankle)

Connell, Dudley—May 9, 2000—Alexandria, VA

Daigrepont, Bruce—July 10, 2001

Dickens, Hazel—May 11, 2000—Washington, DC

Doucet, Michael—January 6, 2005

Dunford, Michael—July 31, 2000

Fawver, Susan—June 15, 2001

Foster, Dan—April 18, 2000—Austin, TX

Hickerson, Joe—November 17, 1999—Austin, TX

Hirsch, Jim—December 15, 1999

Hood, John—July 23, 2000—Austin, TX

Irwin, Ken (all in Cambridge, MA, except as indicated):

(A)—June 9, 1999

(B)—October 13 and 14, 1999

(C)—October 29, 2004 (by telephone)

(D) —November 10, 1995, by Lara Pellegrinelli (transcript in possession of author; no recording in author's possession)

Jabbour, Alan—June 9, 2000

Jones, Glenn—June 8, 2000

Kissil, Don—March 1, 2000

Kornrich, Bill—September 13, 2002

Ledgin, Stephanie—November 10, 1999

Leighton, Marian (all in Cambridge, MA):

(A)—June 8 and 10, 1999

(B)—October 12 and 13, 1999

(C)— November 10, 1995, by Lara Pellegrinelli (transcript in possession of author; no recording in author's possession)

Levine, Marlene and Dick (interviewed jointly)—May 27, 2000—Austin, TX

Lilly, John—February 16, 2001—Vancouver, BC, Canada

McCutcheon, John—September 6, 2000

Menius, Art (by e-mail)

Molsky, Bruce—October 13, 2000—Austin, TX

Moss, Mark—December 6, 1999

Nowlin, Bill (all in Cambridge, MA, except as indicated):

(A)—June 8, 9 and 10, 1999

(B)—October 13 and 14, 1999

(C)—July 19 and 23, 2004 (by telephone)

(D)—December 7, 1995, by Lara Pellegrinelli (transcript in possession of author; no recording in author's possession)

Olivier, Barry—January 20, 1994—Berkeley, CA

Paton, Caroline and Sandy (interviewed jointly) —December 1, 1999

Paul, Brad—October 14, 1999—Cambridge, MA

Pilzer, Charlie—November 4, 1999

Pitts, Randy—March 20, 2000—Austin, TX

Piver, Susan—October 8, 2000 (interviewed jointly with her husband, Duncan Browne)

Powell, Dirk—August 21, 2000

Quillen, Shay—October 31, 2002

Romalis, Shelly—December 1, 1999

Rossi, Neil—June 10, 2001

Sandomirsky, Sharon—March 7, 2000—Austin, TX

San Martin, Brad (by e-mail)

Schwarz, Peter—June 14, 2001—Austin, TX

Spottswood, Richard—May 9, 2000—Silver Spring, MD

Stampfel, Peter—October 5, 2000

Stecher, Jody—February 15, 2001—Vancouver, BC, Canada

Tankle, Dianne—December 6, 1999 (interviewed jointly with her husband, Robert Cohen)

Thomas, Sonny—February 10, 2000—Cleveland, OH

Traum, Happy—March 23, 1992—Woodstock, NY

Trischka, Tony—August 22, 2000

Ulven, Juel—February 3, 2000

Van Ronk, Dave—spring 1993—Berkeley, CA

Weissman, Clark—December 28, 2001 (not recorded; notes in possession of author)

Weissman, Elaine—February 17, 2001—Vancouver, BC, Canada (not recorded; notes in possession of author)

Weisstein, Naomi—July 10, 2001

Wernick, Pete—August 17 and 18, 2000

Whitstein, Charles—September 3, 2000

Wilson, Dan (by e-mail)

Wilson, Joe—May 10, 2000—Washington, DC

Wilson, Mark—October 1, 1999

B. Listservs and electronic discussion groups

Throughout the manuscript I refer to various electronic listservs and bulletin boards, often with reference to specific messages appearing on those resources. In referencing a message I cite, in this order, the name (or screen name) of the individual posting the message, the title of the relevant discussion thread, the name of the listserv or bulletin board, and the date of the posting. I also include the date on which I most recently accessed the particular message. In the following list I provide the URL to the archive or home page of the specified resource, from which readers can find specific messages. I last accessed this information on March 13, 2005.

BGRASS-L (Bluegrass Music Discussion):

<http://lsv.uky.edu/archives/bgrass-l.html>

BLUES-L (Blues Music List):

<http://lists.netspace.org/archives/blues-l.html>

FOLKBIZ (Folk Musician Issues):

<http://lists.psu.edu/archives/folkbiz.html>

FOLKDJ-L (Folk and Bluegrass DJs):

<http://lists.psu.edu/archives/folkdj-l.html>

IBMA-L (International Bluegrass Music Association):

<http://lsv.uky.edu/archives/ibma-l.html> Association membership is required to post messages, but not to read them.

FOLKMUSIC (New American Folk Music):

<http://www.escribe.com/music/folkmusic/>

MUDCAT CAFE:

<mudcat.org> Readers can access the discussion forum by clicking on "Lyrics & Knowledge." They can find particular messages by using the search function. Searchers can use the thread name, the poster name or keywords of their choosing. By searching the Digital Tradition (DT), readers can find the lyrics to over 9000 songs.

REC.MUSIC.FOLK:

<http://groups-beta.google.com/group/rec.music.folk/about> This discussion forum is maintained by Google. Registration is required to post messages but not to search for or read them.

Bibliographic Essay

All of the books that I cite in the text and its footnotes are listed in the selected bibliography that follows. In this essay I offer a brief discussion of those books and other sources that have most influenced my understanding of the concept of folk revivalism. In a few cases, a source that I found illuminating did not prompt a textual reference specific enough to warrant inclusion in the notes. These sources are discussed in this essay, only, and full bibliographic details are provided in the partial bibliography. The footnotes provide a wealth of additional material to those wishing to explore various theoretical, historical and musical aspects of revivalism.

I found it particularly helpful to examine the work of those "culture brokers" or "mediators" who have sought to present folk culture, however idealized, to a wider audience. Benjamin Filene does an excellent job of analyzing such efforts in Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music. I drew particularly on his discussions of Francis Child and Cecil Sharp. I recommend that all students of revivalism study Nolan Porterfield's Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax, 1867-1948, Deborah Kodish's Good Friends and Bad Enemies: Robert Winslow Gordon and the Study of American Folksong and Angus Gillespie's Folklorist of the Coal Fields: George Korson's Life and Work. This biographical triad helped me understand the forces that motivated cultural brokerage, and the analytical quandaries that confronted some of the twentieth century's most ambitious mediators. To understand the efforts of the commercial entrepreneurs who acted, to use Bill Malone's perceptive phrase, as

"unwitting folklorists,"[1] readers should begin with Archie Green's seminal paper "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," which appeared in the so-called "hillbilly issue" of the Journal of American Folklore 78 (July 1965) and is now reprinted in an anthology of Green's writing, Torching the Fink Books and Other Essays on Vernacular Culture. Malone's own Country Music U.S.A. explores both the folk background of the country music industry and the manner in which industry executives sought to harness that background as a marketing tool. In Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity, Richard A. Peterson updates and expands upon the work of Green and Malone.

Regina Bendix analyzes the construct of authenticity in In Search Of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies. Seeing authenticity as a rhetorical stance, she explores the questions "who needs authenticity and why" and "how has authenticity been used."[2] Bendix highlights three initiatives that, since the 1950s, have encouraged folklore scholars to scrutinize their historical reliance on the idea of the authentic. The first was Richard Dorson's campaign against fakelore, which insisted on an authenticity that was, in Bendix's view, impossible to find. The second was the redefinition of folklore in the late 1960s and 1970s, which moved decidedly away from text-centered definitions toward an emphasis on context and performance. Where does authenticity lie, she asks, if folklore consists of an entire communicative event and its surroundings, as opposed to a particular text or type of text. Ultimately the multi-ethnic politics of the 1970s laid bare the deficiencies underlying claims of an objective, essentializing authenticity, as groups striving for social, economic and political power now defined themselves, while often embracing both hybrid traditions and mass-mediated popular culture.

Joli Jensen's The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music and David Grazian's Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs analyze the construct of authenticity in the context of contemporary popular music. Jensen, following Green and Peterson, explores how shifts in country music styles followed changes in technology and popular taste, even as the industry and certain fans valorized a supposed authentic purity. Taking a view that approximates my own, she cautions against the tendency to exalt the old and tradition based as more "authentic," and thus more valuable, than contemporary commercial styles and songs. In his close analysis of the musical and social milieus of various Chicago blues clubs, Grazian demonstrates how patrons and musicians construct equally valid personal meanings through diverse positions along what he terms a "sliding scale of authenticity."[3] In Escaping The Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues, Elijah Wald uses Johnson's legend to demonstrate how romantic white revivalists elevated an ambitious commercial musician to an icon of rural, southern, African-American authenticity, despite a far more complex reality.

Readers interested in the public folklore movement should begin with David Whisnant's classic All That Is Native and Fine, which examines three efforts in cultural intervention in pre-World War II Appalachia. Whisnant offers case studies of how not to intervene, in demonstrating how well-meaning but misguided culture brokers ignored genuine regional problems while attempting cultural rejuvenation based less on reality than on their own naive, romantic ideals. The modern public folklore movement is well represented by three useful anthologies: The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists and the Public Sector, edited by Burt Feintuch, Public Folklore, edited by Robert Baron and

Nicholas R. Spitzer and Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage, edited by Mary Hufford. One of the most helpful discussions of public folklore of which I am aware is Doris Dyen's "Individual and Community: Defining the Goals of Public Folklife Programming," Kentucky Folklore Record 32 (July-December 1986): 91. While some writers find adequate rational for folklife programming in the mere presentation of diversity, Dyen probes more deeply. In her view, public folklore's most important objective should be the encouragement of the self-awareness that arises when community members articulate what is most important to them, with respect to their own group identity. She cautions against rigid efforts to define and preserve tradition—particularly when coupled with an "old world" orientation—in a manner that might prevent diverse groups from establishing needed bonds of mutual support. In essence, Dyen urges programming that goes beyond the tendency toward mere celebration, in favor of that which strives for genuine socio-economic utility.

Richard A. Reuss examines the connection between folk revivalism and leftist political sentiment in his 1971 Indiana University doctoral dissertation American Folklore and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957. Reuss later pursued a career as a social worker, not in academia, and he died at a young age. Due partially to this combination of circumstances, his manuscript remained unpublished for decades as its reputation among scholars grew. In a reference that I remember well but have been unable to trace, one commentator called it an "underground classic" of folk revival scholarship. Scarecrow Press finally issued it in 2000 as American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957, with editing and new material by Reuss's widow, JoAnne C. Reuss. Robbie Lieberman explores much of the same terrain in My Song Is My Weapon: People's

Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-50. Reuss's work informs Lieberman's account, as do the experiences of her father, Ernie Lieberman, a performer active in the politicized folksong movement of the 1940s and 1950s. Joe Klein provides a vivid portrait of that movement in Woody Guthrie: A Life, which David Dunaway augments through his biography, How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger. Shelly Romalis looks at the period through her sympathetic and comprehensive account of Molly Jackson's life, Pistol Packin' Mama: Aunt Molly Jackson And The Politics Of Folksong. Romalis examines not only Jackson but also Jackson's much younger half-sister, Sarah Ogan Gunning, who gained a modicum of fame as a singer of traditional Appalachian ballads during the folk boom of the 1960s. Through the lives and work of these women, Romalis contrasts the highly political revival of the thirties and forties with the more commercial, more media-savvy folksong movement of the sixties. Elijah Wald also traverses these distinct but related phenomena in Josh White: Society Blues, his biography of a performer who struggled to balance his desire for commercial success with political activism and efforts to cast him as an idealized African-American bluesman.

Several works of popular literature succeed in conveying the flavor of the great boom with depth. The American Folk Scene: Dimensions of the Folksong Revival, edited by David A. De Turk and A. Poulin, Jr., is a collection of articles from Sing Out! and other periodicals that were initially published during the boom. Collectively, they trace the movement from its beginning through its decline as a commercial force, offering a helpful understanding of the issues that concerned participants. In Freedom In The Air: Song Movements of the 60's, Josh Dunson offers an admiring contemporaneous account

of the topical song movement. Amidst the plethora of published material about Bob Dylan, Bob Spitz's Dylan: A Biography is best at describing the Greenwich Village folk music scene in the late fifties and early sixties. Anthony Scaduto's Bob Dylan is the earliest full-length biography of the famed composer and performer. While it is reportedly replete with factual errors, it contains a great deal of insightful commentary from Dylan's Village companions, offered while memories were relatively fresh and the full extent of Dylan's status as legend was still unknown. The single best account of a local folk music scene of which I am aware is Baby, Let Me Follow You Down: The Illustrated Story of the Cambridge Folk Years. Participants Eric Von Schmidt and Jim Rooney compiled this oral history. It offers a fascinating portrait of the personalities and places that helped revivalism thrive in the Cambridge/Boston area, while also exploring the pervasive concern about authenticity and commercialism. It is essential reading for those who want to understand the great boom in general and the forces that helped mold Rounder Records in particular.

In Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970, Ronald D. Cohen provides a comprehensive historical account of the sixties boom, offering a wealth of detail about revival participants, venues, record labels and publications. Cohen also edited Wasn't That A Time! Firsthand Accounts of the Folk Music Revival, a collection of essays by movement participants offering personal recollections and analyses. Robert Cantwell's When We Were Good: The Folk Revival is less a history of the movement then an extended meditation on its meaning. Cantwell draws not only on music but also on history and literature in an effort to understand the motives of the largely white, educated, economically comfortable young people who

formed the great boom's core constituency. Neil Rosenberg's Bluegrass: A History is not about revivalism as such, but it contains a helpful discussion of the manner in which northern revivalists helped rejuvenate a country music form that was in commercial decline when the boom began. In Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined, Rosenberg collects essays that analyze the multi-faceted nature of the boom and examine its ongoing impact. Scott Alarik's Deep Community: Adventures in the Modern Folk Underground is the only book-length treatment of which I am aware that analyzes the post-boom folk music scene. Alarik is a journalist and the book is a collection of profiles and reviews that he published in various periodicals between 1986 and 2002. Because he did not initially intend these pieces to be read as a group, there is a fair amount of repetition in Alarik's themes. Moreover, as a musician himself and an active participant in the folk scene he describes, Alarik tends to be fairly uncritical of his subjects. However, his closeness to the scene is also a strong asset, providing him with a genuine understanding of the artistic and social concerns of both musicians and fans.

Those interested in a fuller exploration of old-time music should begin with Charles K. Wolfe's A Good Natured Riot: The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry, which offers an entertaining picture of the early days of the legendary and still ongoing live radio show through which entrepreneurs and professionally ambitious artists helped transform rural, tradition-based music into an industry. In The Devil's Box: Masters Of Southern Fiddling Wolfe examines the fiddle convention phenomenon, explores the instrument's central role in early commercial country music and profiles selected fiddle stars, including "reluctant hillbilly" Clayton McMichen and Rounder artist Clark Kessinger. Karen Linn's That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture

examines that other instrumental staple of early country music, and includes a discussion of the banjo's role in the great boom.

Shane K. Bernard's The Cajuns: Americanization of a People was a tremendous asset in helping me understand Cajun culture. Focusing on the period from World War II to the present, Bernard describes the tension between assimilation and ethnic pride that pervaded Cajun society in the late twentieth century. In Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People, Volume I, Ann Allen Savoy offers interviews with and profiles of Cajun music and zydeco legends, including the well-known Dewey Balfa and Clifton Chenier. Volume II has not yet appeared. John Broven provides a detailed, fan-oriented history in South to Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous, which blends discussion of Cajun music, zydeco, rhythm and blues and swamp pop. In The Kingdom of Zydeco Michael Tisserand offers a history of the form that pays closer attention to its role as a source of racial pride than does the work of either Savoy or Broven. Ben Sandmel covers the same ground in Zydeco!, which is enriched by the beautiful photography of Rich Olivier.

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[1] Bill C. Malone, Country Music, U.S.A., rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 38.

[2] Regina Bendix, In Search Of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 21.

[3] David Grazian, Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 13.

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Vita

Michael Francis Scully was born in New York City on April 12, 1954, the son of John Joseph Scully and Elizabeth Ann Scully. After graduating from New York's Bayside High School in 1972, he briefly attended the University of Colorado at Boulder. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1976 from the State University of New York at Binghamton and the degree of Juris Doctor in 1980 from King Hall, the school of law at the University of California at Davis. He practiced law in San Francisco for approximately 15 years before entering the Graduate School at the University of Texas in 1995. Mr. Scully is married and has two children.

Permanent address: 1307 Wilderness Dr., Austin, Texas 78746

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